

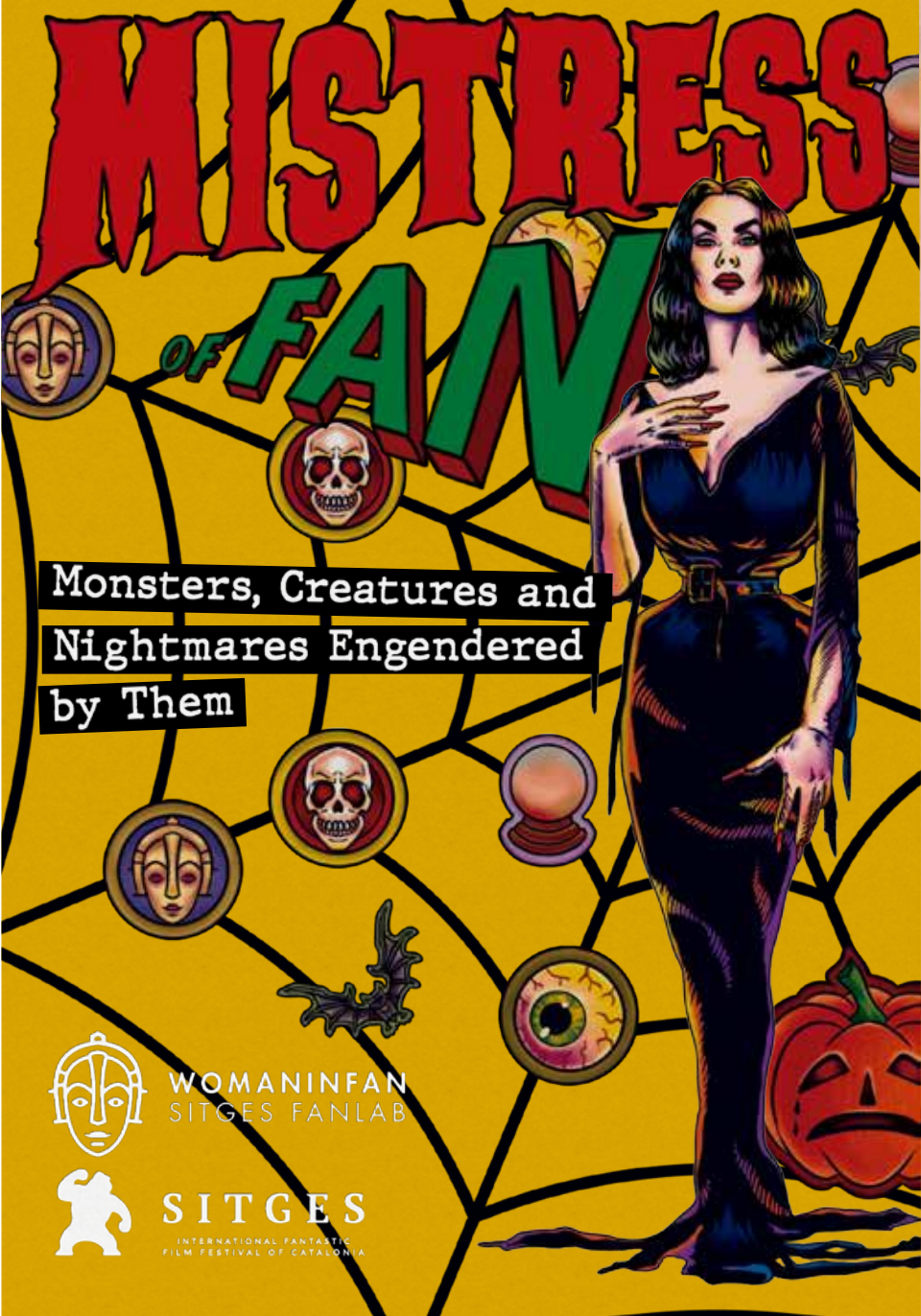
... a hellish Heaven where chaos reigns!

ALAMO DRAFTHOUSE
PRESENTS

Fantastike Fest



AN ONGOING FANTASY SERIES by A.D. Rafterhouse



Monsters, Creatures and
Nightmares Engendered
by Them



WOMANINFAN
SITGES FANLAB



SITGES
INTERNATIONAL FANTASY
FILM FESTIVAL OF CATALUNYA

ALAMO DRAFTHOUSE
PRESENTS

Santastie Fest 2023

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..... Introduction:

HERE WE GO AGAIN!

.....

One more year, one more Fantastic Fest. Our team of programmers scouted the four corners of the planet to make this your best week of the year. Not only will you get to see the coolest most recent gems around, but you'll also get to mingle with the Fantastic family, which to our delight is getting bigger and bigger every year.

As our long-time audience members know, no film is too small for Fantastic Fest. This year, alongside some fantastic bigger features that will blow your brains out, we're proud to world Premiere quite a few smaller independent films with a lot of heart (and punch!). With films coming from countries such as Spain, Croatia, South Korea, Latvia, USA, France, Morocco, India, Japan, Poland, Czech Republic, Brazil... we almost have it all. We hope you are well rested because once we pop the lid, there is no stopping until the end! From our signature events to podcasts, live concerts, parties and Highball events, we made sure to fill our schedule to the last slot. Burnt Ends is back as well, with some highly anticipated titles and our rep section is through the roof with superb restorations of classic genre films and some Inglorious Critters that will make you weep.

We're very happy and proud to continue our collaboration with the Sitges International Fantastic Film Festival of Catalonia by supporting their initiative Woman in Fan, which not only pushes the awareness of current filmmakers but is also about giving credit where credit is due and acknowledging female filmmakers who worked in genre cinema throughout history.

Our team has worked really hard to put this event together, from programming, to logistics, marketing and projection, and we sincerely hope that you'll be curious about every movie and every event we've put on the grid, and that sometimes you'll go for the least obvious choice. Curiosity will not kill you at Fantastic Fest. Quite the contrary: you'll be rewarded for it.

It's time to witness the rise of Diabolic Chingu and to celebrate his coming with eight days of delightful and exquisite nightmares. Let the ecstatic Chaos reign once again!

-FANTASTIC FEST



THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS

.....



THANK YOU

.....

THIS EDITION OF FANTASTIC FEST WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE
WITHOUT THE KIND SUPPORT OF MANY, INCLUDING:

Ahbra Perry / Alex Johnson / Alexandra Griesmer / Anna Bogutskaya / Annick Mahnert
Austin Culp / Austin King / Benjamin Pedley / Bex Feldbin / Billy Ray Brewton / Brad
Abrahams / Brad Johnson / Brad Sorensen / Brandy Fons / Bret Berg / Bridget Garraway
Britney Salyer / Britt Keller / Brittany Wolfe / Celia Mattison / Chaya Rosenthal / Cheryl
Fawks / Chris Bilheimer / Chris Larsen / Christian Nelson / Christie Lawler / Christine Smith
Claudia Jaramillo / Clay Keller / Conner Makenzie Smith / Dan Parker / Dana Archip / Dani
Thomas / Dani Tumbusch / Danielle York / Danielle Poirier / Dylan Jones / Emily Sears / Eric
Lam / Estefania Monarrez / Fons PR / Gabe Chicoine / Haddy Murr / Alamo IT Team / Jake
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Grenzfurthner / John Laird / John W. Smith / Jordan Likover / Josh Hurtado / Joshua Brown
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Jimenez / Lamar Union / Leonard Maltin / Lisa Dreyer / Lori Donnelly / Louise Weard /
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Lloyd / Reese Cisneros / Ryan Fons / Ryan Marker / Sabine Fontenote / Sadie Yoder / Samantha
Lopez / Sandra Woolf / Savanna Heydon / Shannon Bryant / Shannon Wiedemeyer / Shawn
Perry / Sloane Smith / South Austin Gym / Suzanne Bonifaz / The Alamo Drafthouse South
Lamar Team / The Alamo Creative Team / The Highball Team / The Projection Team / The
Volunteer Team / Tiernan O'Rourke / Tim League / Travis Smith / Trish Eichelberger / Tyler
Talley / Varun Raman / Zack Carlson / Zane Gordon-Bouzar



3/4 SLEEVE T \$30



VHS T \$30



DEMON CHINGU HOODIE \$50



PINT GLASS \$35



BANDANA \$15

OFFICIAL FANTASTIC FEST MERCHANDISE

AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE AT
ALAMO SOUTH LAMAR



PIN SET \$18



POSTER \$15



ABORTION ACTION



ADULTERY AFRO

MOVIE ICONS:

Designed by kiwis Ant Timpson & Mike Sheils for the INCREDIBLY STRANGE FILM FESTIVAL in the early 90s, "the icons" are a quick visual reference guide for the movies and events in the program. The 2023 Fantastic Fest Guide continues the tradition for discerning American audiences. Want to watch a flick with children perilously attending a mermaid dinner party? No problem! Don't want to watch a cult movie with extreme violence and animal abuse? No problem! Let the icons before each movie summary guide you to complete cinematic satisfaction.



ALCOHOL ABUSE ALIEN ALTERNATE WORLDS ALUMNI ANARCHY ANIMAL ABUSE ANIMAL ATTACKS ANIMAL VIOLENCE ANIMATION APOCALYPSE



ASS TO FACE CONTACT ASSASSINATION AUTOMATIC WEAPONS BACNE BAD TEETH BALD SEX BARE CHEST MEN BEAUTIFUL HAIR BEE HIVES BIG BREASTS



BLACK COMEDY BLINDNESS BLOCK-BUSTER BOLLYWOOD BONDAGE BREAKING 4TH WALL BULLYING BUNNIES CANNIBAL CAR CHASE



CASTRATION CHEESY FX CHICKS IN CHAINS CHILDREN IN PERIL CHRIST CINEMA SCOPE CLASSIC CLOWN COCAINE COCKU-MENTARY



COMEDY CONFETTI COOCH COPRO-PILISTIC CREEPY DOLLS DANCING DATE MOVIE DECAPITATION DEFENESTRATION DICKHEAD DINNER PARTY



DIRTY COPS DISTURBING DOCUMENTARY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DOUBLE FIST DREAM SEQUENCE DRUGS DUBBED DWARF DYSTOPIA



EATING DISORDER EMOTIVE CONTENT EXPLOSION EYEBALL VIOLENCE FACE MELT FACE SLAPPING FACE TO CROTCH FAN BOYS FAST FOOD FELLATIO



FILM WITH A FILM FISHHOOK VIOLENCE FLASHBACK FOOD POISONING FULL FRONTAL FURRIES GANG FIGHT GANGBANG GAY SEX GENDER CONFUSION



GENETIC MUTATION GHOSTS GIALLO GIANT GOING INSANE GRAPHIC VIOLENCE GROSS OUT HARDBOILED DIALOG HEAD TRAUMA HEIST



HIPPY HITLER HOOK FOR HAND HUGE MUSTACHE HYPNOTISM INBRED INCEST INFANT DEATH INFLATABLE SEX ISOLATION



JESUS JUNGIAN CONCEPTS JUNGLE FEVER JUVENILE DELINQUENT KAJU KILLER CULT KILLER KID KITSCH KUNG FU LACTATION



LARGE ORGANS LESBIAN VAMPIRE LESBIAN LIPOSUC-TION LOOKS LIKE A DICK LOW BUDGET LYNCHIAN MAD MAGICIAN MARIJUANA MASTURBA-TION



MELODRAMA MENAGE A TROIS MENTAL ILLNESS MERMAID METAL MILD VIOLENCE MISCAR-RIAGE MONSTER SEX MONSTERS MONTAGE



MOTHER ISSUES MOUNTAIN TAPPING MOUTH TO MOUTH MULLET MUSIC MUSICAL NASTY ANIMATION NAZIS NECRO-PHILIA NICOLAS CAGE



NO BUDGET NOIR NOODLING NUDITY OSCAR SHAME PEDO-PHILIA PENIS TRAUMA PET ABUSE PETROL SNIFFING POLICE BRUTALITY



POLITICALLY INCORRECT PORNOGRA-PHY POSSESSION PRETEN-TIOUS PRIMATE LOVE PROSTITUTE PSYCHIC PUBIC HAIR PUNK PUPPET SEX



RACIST RAPE RELIGIOUS CULT REVENGE ROBOTS SATAN SCALPING SCENERY CHEWING SCHIZO SCIENCE FICTION



SCIENTIST SCOPO-PHILIA SELF MUTILATION SEMEN SEWAGE SEXUAL VIOLENCE SHAKEY FACE SHOCKING ENDING SKELETON IN THE CLOSET SLEAZY



SPACE EX-PLORATION SPECIAL EVENT STOCK FOOTAGE STOP MOTION STRIPPERS STROBE LIGHTS STRONG SEXU-ALCONTENT STUNTS SUBTITLES SUICIDE



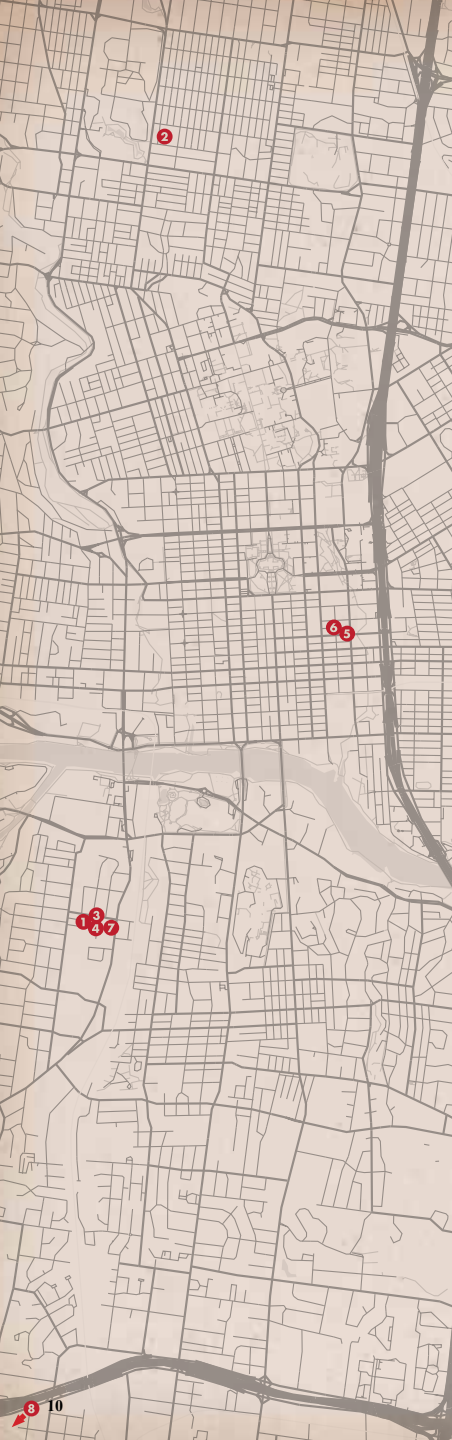
SUPER POWER SURGERY SURPRISE ENDING SURREAL TALKING BRAIN TALKING ANIMALS TELEPATHY TERRIFYING TOILET HUMOR TORTURE



TRANS4MA-TION TRASH TREKKIE DELIGHT TRIPPY TRUE STORY TWIST ULTRA VIOLENCE UNDERAGE SEX VAMPIRES VEHICULAR DEATH



VIDEO GAMES VOODOO WEREWOLF WITCH DOCTOR WORKMAN'S CRACK THE WORKS WRESTLING Z-GRADE ZOMBIE



1: ALAMO DRAFTHOUSE SOUTH LAMAR

1120 S Lamar Blvd. Austin, TX 78704

2: ALAMO DRAFTHOUSE HQ (Baker Center)

3908 Avenue B. Austin, TX 78751

3: GREENBELT BOTANICALS (Badge Pickup)

1100 S Lamar Blvd 3, Suite 3130
Austin, TX 78704

4: THE HIGHBALL

1120 S Lamar Blvd. Austin, TX 78704

5: HOTEL INDIGO

810 Red River St. Austin, TX 78701

6: HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS

805 Neches St. Austin, TX 78701

7: LAMAR UNION PLAZA

1100 S Lamar Blvd. Austin, TX 78704

8: SOUTH AUSTIN GYM

5700 Menchaca Rd #365 Austin, TX 78745

BADGE PICKUP

All the badges can be picked up at the location below. Remember to bring your ID.

GREENBELT BOTANICALS

1100 S Lamar Blvd 3, Suite 3130
(next to the Alamo Drafthouse South Lamar)
(9/21-24) 9 a.m. - 9 p.m.
(9/25-28) 9 a.m. - 6 p.m.

FANTASTIC FEST APP

Tickets for every round can be reserved via our Fantastic Fest app, available in the Apple and Google Stores. Just log in using your Eventive password and make your selection of fantastic movies!

More Information:

SAFETY FIRST

FILM, FOOD & FUN IN A CLOSE SECOND

As the world continues to spin on in this new normal, we want to assure you that your safety is still top of mind at Alamo Drafthouse and Fantastic Fest. COVID is still here. It isn't the same COVID of 2020, but it is still a concern. And as we'll be around each other for eight days straight, we recommend showing common courtesy towards the Fantastic Fest community. We recommend taking a cue from Jason and wearing a mask when not eating or drinking. The Alamo's enhanced sanitization practices will also remain active so that we can continue to provide the safest theater experience possible.

Forgot your mask? We're happy to provide one.

CODE OF CONDUCT

MOVIES ARE MEANT FOR EVERYONE

This is a safe, respectful, inclusive, and fun environment for everyone to enjoy movies and events. This Code of Conduct applies to everyone at the venue and participants in our social media channels. Guests, staff, volunteers, vendors, and press will be held to the same standards. We reserve the right to remove or ban any person who does not adhere to the Code of Conduct.

We do not tolerate harassment of any kind, including:

- Intimidation or threats
- Inappropriate disruption of events
- Hurtful language
- Physical assault of any type
- Inappropriate physical contact
- Unwanted sexual attention
- Unwanted photography or video recording
- Bullying or stalking

Especially in connection to:

- Race or ethnicity
- National origin
- Gender identity or presentation
- Sex or sexual orientation
- Age
- Disability, medical condition or pregnancy
- Religion
- Citizenship status

WHAT TO DO:

- If you are asked to stop any harassing behavior, STOP immediately. Seriously.
- If you experience or witness any form of harassment, please contact the nearest staff member. A manager will address the situation. To file a formal complaint, email conduct@drafthouse.com. All complaints will be investigated - please provide detailed information and your contact information.
- If you feel unsafe in your immediate situation, alert our staff, move to a safe location and dial 911.
- When a complaint is received, a festival or Alamo Drafthouse manager will be brought in ASAP. They will get the information and address the situation immediately by removing the harasser or taking similar necessary action. The manager may also contact the police if there is a safety issue. If the concerned party would like to file a formal complaint, they will send it to conduct@drafthouse.com, where it will be investigated by trained staff members. All complaint emails will receive a response within 24 hours during the festival. The privacy of all parties will be maintained during an investigation and the person making the complaint will be kept informed and notified when the investigation is completed.

EVENTS

CELEBRATE THE TOXIC AVENGER

5:30 PM | 9/21/23 | HIGHBALL

We'll kick off the fest with a celebration of our opening night film THE TOXIC AVENGER with special drinks and surprises presented by our friends at Legendary Pictures.

OPENING NIGHT PARTY

10 PM | 9/21/23 | HIGHBALL

The Octopus Project will transform The Highball into a sonically sinister space, followed by an all vinyl, all satanic DJ set from Zack Carlson.

THE KINGCAST

2 PM | 9/22/23 | THEATER 10

THE KINGCAST is a Stephen King podcast for Stephen King obsessives hosted by former film bloggers and rabid horror fans Eric Vespe and Scott Wampler. Each week, the pair welcomes a notable guest to the show to discuss their choice of the King adaptation (or unadapted novel/short story). It's an unpredictable show that can turn on a dime between being legitimately emotional and outright hilarious. It always approaches the work of its legendary namesake with the love, respect, and top-shelf nerdery it deserves.

LIVE FOUND FOOTAGE SHOW

2 PM | 9/22/23 | THEATER 9

Join champions of VHS Joe Pickett and Nick Prueher from The Found Footage Festival, for this special presentation of bizarre, hilarious, and unbelievable film finds.

DRAG ME TO HELL

10 PM | 9/22/23 | HIGHBALL

A hellishly good drag show curated by our favorite star Louisiana Purchase and a few of her friends. Louisiana Purchase is one of the stars of the Boulet Brothers' Dragula Season 3 and she was named "Best Drag Performer" by the Austin Chronicle from 2016-2018. In 2022 this Queen scared the skirt of Satan and stole his throne, so we had no choice but to let her lead us down the catwalk to hell, wig first!

BEOWULF LIVE PERFORMANCE

2 PM | 9/23/23 | THEATER 10

John Heimbuch performs Charlie Bethel's popular one-man adaptation of Beowulf! This faithful and accessible adaptation of this classic Old English poem about a warrior king and three famous monsters, emphasizes the wit, vigor, and meaty language of the original Anglo-Saxon epic. John Heimbuch first performed Beowulf at the 2019 Minnesota Fringe Festival, and has performed it at backyards, bars, schools, theatres, firesides, parks, conventions, and online ever since. He is proud to continue the legacy of Charlie Bethel's work.

HI-YAH! HAPPY HOUR

3 PM | 9/23/23 |

Enjoy a special free drink from our friends at Hi-Yah! Hi-YAH! is your new favorite martial arts and Asian action movie channel! Featuring hundreds of hours of programming, refreshed monthly, including your favorites from Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, Donnie Yen, Tony Jaa, Johnnie To, Yuen Woo-Ping and more.

DJ JESTER THE FILIPINO FIST

8 PM | 9/23/23 | HIGHBALL

Join us in the Highball for some dark and spooky tunes being spun by our friend DJ Jester the Filipino Fist. He has toured the world with acts like Kid Koala, of Montreal, MGMT, Third Eye Blind, and Joe Jack Talcum of the Dead Milkmen.

FANTASTIC DEBATES

MIDNIGHT | 9/23/23 | SOUTH AUSTIN GYM

Filmmaker fists! Journalist jabs!! Actor attackers!!! From verbal violence to pugilistic pummeling, we have the rage you crave at the Fantastic Debates, where the burning questions facing the fan community are resolved once and for all! Past Fantastic Debates have featured screen titans like Keanu Reeves, Elijah Wood, Michelle Rodriguez, Ti West and Udo Kier (plus a surprise visit from Dolph Lundgren!), as well as a host of critics, bloggers, bruisers and movie maniacs. Debaters to be announced shortly... and powerfully!

MALTIN ON MOVIES

5 PM | 9/24/23 | THEATER 10

Legendary film critic (and both long time friends of Fantastic Fest) Leonard Maltin and his daughter Jessie are the ultimate movie fans. They love talking about movies, especially with people who share their enthusiasm—from living legends like Mel Brooks, Carl Reiner, and Quincy Jones to such contemporary artists as Amy Adams, Viggo Mortensen, Laura Dern, and Bryan Cranston. You'll meet all kinds of interesting people and hear their recommendations of unsung movies you ought to know...

LIVE BAND KARAOKE

8 PM | 9/24/23 | HIGHBALL

Join us in the Highball for karaoke with a real four piece band to make you feel like a rockstar! Sign up and sing your soul out to Chingu.

FANTASTIC FAIR

2 PM | 9/25/23 | HIGHBALL

Reading is fantastic at this multi-author marketplace of books, comics and more! Ghoulish Books presents a special Fantastic Fest Book Fair - featuring over a dozen authors slinging books, comics, 'zines and more. Attendees will be able to visit with Texas-based authors and pick up a book to read between festival films. This is just like the book fairs you went to as a kid - but a whole lot weirder, a slight bit spookier, and of course, way more f'n fantastic.

EVENTS [CONT.]

16MM BATTLE PARADISE VS INFERNO 8 PM | 9/25/23 | HIGHBALL

Join us for an unforgettable cinematic experience as A/V Geeks and Bat City Cinema proudly presents a captivating 16mm film screening like no other. Embark on a journey through the realms of human behavior with a collection of thought-provoking films that delve into the darker aspects of existence, illuminating the path that leads a person toward the depths of Hell. But fear not, for amidst the shadows, we also unveil the films that hold the power to redeem, enlighten, and save a person's very soul. Witness the juxtaposition of vice and virtue, sin and salvation, all meticulously curated to engage your senses and ignite introspection. Take advantage of this extraordinary event, where the 16mm reels unspool stories of both caution and redemption, challenging us to contemplate the dichotomy of our human experience.

FANTASTIC FEUD MIDNIGHT | 9/25/23 | THEATER 5

Our long-running vulgar display of geek knowledge pits the globe's greatest genre goons/scholars against each other in a galactic onslaught of mental agility, verbal hostility and brilliant stupidity! Filmmakers, journalists and various other movie megamasters collide in this no-holds-barred deathride of useless cinematic information and on-screen in(s)anity, all masterminded by Triviadome's teeny-tiny host Maxim Pozderac.

DUNGEONS & DRAFTHOUSE w/ DUNGEON IN A BOX 11 AM | 9/26/23 | HIGHBALL

A fun 3 hour one-shot brought to you by our friends at Dungeon in a Box. Take a load off and join a party and go on a fun campaign and maybe journey to the depths of the nine hells. Roll the d20 and test your fates!

HORROR QUEERS PODCAST 2 PM | 9/26/23 | THEATER 10

Queer horror podcast! Written up in Variety, The AV Club, & The NY Times. Part of Bloody Disgusting's Bloody FM. Each week, queer hosts Joe Lipsett and Trace Thurman discuss a horror film with LGBTQ+ themes, a high camp quotient or both.

QUEER FILM THEORY 101 8 PM | 9/26/23 | HIGHBALL

Queer Film Theory 101 is a film and comedy lecture series focused on dissecting heteronormative films of our youths and pointing out the hidden queer narratives. Basically, we ruin films for straight people and yell about the characters that made us feel gay. It's fun!

100 BEST KILLS MIDNIGHT | 9/26/22 | THEATER 5

Fantastic Fest's life-defying clip show returns from the grave with a dazzling onslaught-er of the finest chills, thrills, and kills in a presentation you never wanted to see, but won't be able to look away from!

100 Best Kills dates back to the earliest days of Fantastic Fest, a cornerstone of the fest's grand tradition of lowbrow pandemonium. In previous years, we've focused our knee-slapping man-reaping sights on everything from vehicular mayhem to gut-busting infanticide. We brought you Vehikills and decapitations during the pandemic years; You sick and depraved fools still couldn't get enough! What sick theme have we chosen for this year? You'll have to commune with us at midnight to find out!

BURIED IN PAINT 12 PM | 9/27/25 | HIGHBALL

I'm going to Hell, who's coming with me?!?!

What better way to get in the deathly spirit than to paint your own tombstone? Don't trust the government to do right with your tax dollars; don't trust your family, friends, and loved ones to respect your wishes when you are dead! That's right, we said it! If you want your legacy preserved in the epitaph of your choosing, then you have to write yourself. Join us for some relaxing crafts in The Highball as we are guided through the best ways to customize your tombstone for the end of your life and the festival. We will take your grave and place them in designated plots at the closing night party where they will remain forever, or until someone digs them up to build a virtual pickleball court. Souls not guaranteed to rest in peace.

THE DIESEL SYSTEM- SPECIAL EDITION

THE FIRST EVER FILM FESTIVAL WITHIN A FILM FESTIVAL! 2 PM | 9/27/22 | THEATER 10

Vin Diesel is known for his epic big-screen outings, but the original Family Man is also secretly a short-form king. The Diesel System podcast is hosting the first-ever Vin Diesel Mini Film Festival - a retrospective celebrating the unseen, obscure, and remastered works of our time's most enigmatic movie star. Nine movies into Fast and Furious and three separate blockbustin' franchises under his belt, the Big D has only begun to give America a taste of what he really has to offer. Here at Fantastic Fest, we are cutting off our sleeves and calling in the real experts, the scientific minds behind the Diesel System, to dig up the dirt and shake all the fruit out of that big tall tree.

About the Diesel System Podcast:

Hosts Christian and Spencer are diving deep into the films of the action movie icon. Together, they're running Vin's entire filmography through "The Diesel System" - a scientific method designed to determine a definitive ranking of every Vin Diesel Movie (VDM™).

CLOSING NIGHT PARTY 10 PM | 9/28/23

Epip surprises await you at our legendary closing night party!

.....OFFICIAL COMPETITION JURORS:



DAVID FARRIER (NEW ZEALAND)

David Farrier is a New Zealand born journalist currently based in Los Angeles. With a 10-year background in TV journalism, in 2016 he directed *Tickled* which the *New York Times* called “Fun and giggles until it isn’t anymore”. In 2018 he executive produced and hosted 8-part doc series *Dark Tourist* for Netflix which saw him swim in an atomic lake in Kazakhstan and meet Pablo Escobar’s hitman Popeye. His new feature documentary *Mister Organ* Premiered at Fantastic Fest last year, and will be releasing more widely in the US later this year. Farrier also writes the *Webworm* newsletter and created the weekly *Flightless Bird*, part of Dax Shepard’s *Armchair Expert* umbrella.



KATE GONDWE (USA)

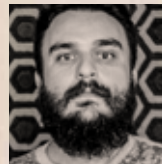
Kate Gondwe is the Manager of Acquisitions, Development, and Production at award-winning independent studio NEON, with an extensive background in supporting diverse voices through audience campaign strategies. In addition, Kate was named one of the 25 New Faces of Independent Film by Filmmaker Magazine, and she has participated in the Sundance Catalyst Program, Locarno Industry Academy, Tribeca Through Her Lens, IFP Week, and Berlinale Talents.



VANESSA MEYER (CANADA)

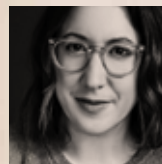
Vanessa is a filmmaker, producer, and programmer based in Brooklyn, NY. She makes movies (and other art) about how it’s hard to deal with our feelings and runs development labs and markets to help other people get their movies made. She has a PhD in Communications with a specialization in personal storytelling and feminist media studies. She is currently Programming Director for GEMS’ Genre Film Lab. She has worked for Tribeca Film Festival, is the former Programming Director for Frontières Int. Co-pro Market, and was Head of Development for Brooklyn based Documentary Prod-co Hard Working Movies. She just completed her first fiction short film (*Foot Trouble*, 2022) and is currently in development on a one woman show.

.....HORROR JURORS:



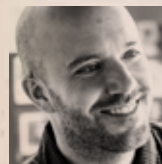
JOÃO FLECK (BRAZIL)

João Fleck holds a PhD in marketing. He works as a film producer and he’s the director and curator of Fantasia film festival for 20 years and counting.



MICHELLE SHWARZSTEIN (USA)

Michelle is the CEO of Brainstorm Media, a 28-year-old, boutique US distribution company. She leads a team of passionate, smart, dedicated people who share her enthusiasm for creative and collaborative distribution. Over the past 11 years at the company she has grown from her role managing Brainstorm’s video-on-demand sales to leading the acquisitions, marketing, and operations for the company’s growing all-rights distribution business and into the role of CEO. Michelle has a degree in Writing, Literature and Publishing from Emerson College and an MBA with a specialization in Entrepreneurship from UCLA Anderson.



CARTER SMITH (USA)

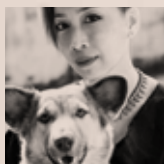
Carter Smith is a writer, director, and photographer who grew up in rural Maine before moving to New York City to work as a fashion photographer. His first short film, *Bugcrush*, won the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival and was his first foray into the world of queer fear and body horror. His ongoing personal project, *All The Dead Boys.com*, explores the murky place where the beautiful and the horrific meet. His feature films include *The Ruins*, *Jamie Marks is Dead*, *Midnight Kiss*, and *Swallowed*, which played at Fantastic Fest in 2022 and marked a return to the horrors of small-town Maine. His coming-of-age-hostage-road-trip-thriller, *The Passenger*, was just released by Blumhouse.

..... NEXT WAVE JURORS:



FRANK JAFFE (USA)

Frank Jaffe is the founder of Altered Innocence, an LGBTQ+ and Coming-of-Age focused film distributor shining a light on young artists and transgressive pieces of arthouse cinema from around the world. Films released have included Yann Gonzalez's *Knife + Heart*, Gaspar Noé's *Irreversible*, and Iván Zulueta's *Arrebato* (*Rapture*). Previous workplaces include Strand Releasing and Outfest Los Angeles. Passions include tacos, boys, and a good book.



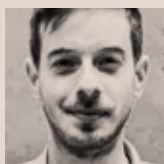
MATTIE DO (USA)

If you've met Mattie Do, she's shown you photos of her dogs. If you've seen her movies, then you've seen her dogs act. Over the years, Mattie's dogs have starred in a few good ghost stories that have screened at Venice's Giornate degli Autori, Fantastic Fest, Sitges, Toronto, and Busan; headlined project markets including Frontières, selection for IFFAM's inaugural *Crouching Tigers*; and garnered recognition as Laos' first submission to the 90th Academy Awards. Mattie's dogs live in Vientiane, Laos where they're helping her develop the country's film industry. Mattie also has two cats, but the little beasts refuse to take direction.



ANDY VOLK (USA)

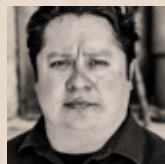
Andy is a versatile, DIY filmmaker with roots in Tucson, AZ and currently resides in Austin, TX as the Senior Film Programmer for Austin Film Festival. He found a deep passion for film between theater-hopping to escape the summer heat and endless rewatches of *Star Wars* and *Monty Python*. He got his start with Seattle International Film Festival as he worked towards a B.A. in Film Studies from Seattle University. Having freelanced throughout the industry, Andy holds a deep admiration for the craft and collaboration inherent to all filmmaking. Andy is driven by supporting emerging filmmakers and sharing films that celebrate all things weird and absurd about being human.



CHARLES BIN (BELGIUM)

Charles Bin was born in France the year *Wild at Heart* was awarded a Palme d'Or, and his first child memory is screening the *Gremlins*. Growing up in Paris, each year he became more weirdly obsessed with films, spending most of his time in the cinemas or at the video store. He finally decided to surrender: after working as a barman, production assistant and entertainment lawyer, he launched in 2019 *BEST FRIEND FOREVER*, a sales outfit based in Brussels, along with his oldest friend Martin Gondre- representing ten films a year, such as *Atlantis* by Valentyn Vasyanovych (Venice Orizzonti '19), *The Twentieth Century* by Matthew Rankin (TIFF Midnight Madness '19), *Saint Narcisse* by Bruce LaBruce (Venice Days '20), *Coma* by Bertrand Bonello (Berlinale '22) or *Banel & Adama* by Ramata Toulaye-Sy (Cannes Competition '23). He since relentlessly pursues his quest to find the best films around, frantically traveling the world to meet the most talented directors and producers and maniacally selling their latest works to festival programmers, distributors, broadcasters and exhibitors abroad. After bringing three films to play at Fantastic Fest so far (*Mother Schmuckers* by Lenny& Harpo Guit, *Bloody Oranges* by Jean-Christophe Meurisse and *The Strange Case of Jacky Caillou* by Lucas Delangle), he's bloody honored to be on Jury duty for its 18th edition!

..... SHORT FILM JURORS:



NIXON GUERRERO (USA)

From Crystal City, TX, a natural born cinephile, and an unapologetic genre fan, Nixon D. Guerrero is the General Manager for Troublemaker Studios, Robert Rodriguez and Elizabeth Avellan's independent film studio in Austin, TX. Nixon likes to say he grew up at Troublemaker. He started his 16-year tenure as a visual effects assistant and eventually moved up to General Manager for the studio. In his first year, he expressed interest in the mechanics of running a studio and Robert and Elizabeth nurtured that curiosity, granting him limitless access to a wealth of knowledge and experience. Nixon is a hybrid in the industry and can speak film and art with top filmmakers, musicians, and writers and can also dissect budgets, P&Ls, and balance sheets with producers and business titans. Nixon is an avid supporter of local crews and local productions and is often discussing with legislators the economic benefits of having productions in the great State of Texas.



DANIEL NORTHWAY-FRANK (CANADA)

Daniel Northway-Frank is a screen consultant and Distribution Director at Isuma Distribution International. He works with LGBTQ+, BIPOC creators on marketing, festival strategy and granting support, and in his distribution role, oversees promotion of Indigenous language titles around the world. Over his 10 years as Institute Director, Daniel helped grow the imagineNATIVE film and media arts festival into the largest of its kind. He's thrilled to bring some of the best (and darkest!) Indigenous work of recent years to Fantastic Fest!



CHELSEA LUPKIN (USA)

Chelsea Lupkin is a Senior Programmer at Short of the Week and is known for her short horror film *Lucy's Tale*, which Premiered at the Fantasia International Film Festival in 2018 and was released online in the summer of 2019 on Gunpowder & Sky's horror platform, ALTER, where it has been viewed over 5.9 million times. She went on to make another short horror film called *Flagged* in collaboration with the Sundance Institute and Hulu, where it is now streaming. Her latest short, *Scooter*, also Premiered at the Fantasia International Film Festival in 2022 and became an Official Selection of the SITGES Film Festival and Beyond Fest within its festival lineup.



INGLORIOUS CRITTERS

Last year we had sharks, and this year we have critters. For some reason, I have a fascination for creatures that can harm you, no matter how small or big they are. Maybe my fascination comes from my late father being an arachnologist and herpetologist and the fact that he would always make sure that I knew NOT to be afraid of these creatures but rather to see their beauty. Because in all their lethality, they are magnificent, and we should get to know them instead of fearing them.

But not these ones! Spearheading the Inglorious Critters sidebar for all you arachnophobes is Sébastien Vaniček's *Infested* (aka *Vermin*). Watch an itty spider spread her cobweb (and eggs) throughout an apartment building. From France, we're heading over to Hong Kong to watch hundreds of centipedes crawl over some people in *Centipede Horror*. I honestly don't even know how this movie was shot considering that, even though not lethal, centipede bites are pretty painful. Back in the US, giant radioactive mutated crickets in *Bugged!* will terrify a bunch of people in a house, and in *The Nest*, genetically mutated cockroaches are out for blood on the small island of North Port.

We went through quite a few films and could honestly make this sidebar a festival of its own, but we went for lesser-known titles and then just the craziest or funniest ones. Huge thanks to AGFA for facilitating the selection process.

We hope you'll enjoy our little critter show and remember: Don't mess with nature. It will come back to bite you in the ass.

-Annick Mahnert



BUGGED! (PRESENTED BY AGFA AND TROMA)

1996 / DIR: Ronald K. Armstrong / 82 mins / USA

The debut from Black filmmaker Ronald K. Armstrong, *BUGGED!* is an ultra-fun and ambitious DIY creature feature. Following a freak lab accident with major RE-ANIMATOR vibes, a woman named Devine hires the Dead and Buried Exterminators to rid her house of some overgrown crickets. The bug-busters soon realize that these aren't just large crickets, but radioactive beasts with a lust for blood! Filled with goopy practical effects and a charming mood, *BUGGED!* is an important and overlooked chapter of 1990s horror from a Black perspective. (AGFA)



CENTIPEDE HORROR (PRESENTED BY AGFA AND ERROR 4444)

1982 / DIR: Keith Li / 94 mins / Honk Kong

After his sister dies under mysterious circumstances while on vacation, Wai Lun decides to take matters into his own hands. Soon enough, he discovers a family curse, battling wizards, and centipedes — lots and lots of centipedes. Written by Amy Chan Suet Ming (RED SPELL SPELLS RED) and filled with creepy crawlies, melodrama, evil spirits, a very cute dog, and insect-barfing, CENTIPEDE HORROR is a true discovery for adventurous horror-fiends. Never released legitimately on home video in the U.S., the movie is finally available as a newly restored DCP from the original camera negative! (AGFA)



THE NEST (PRESENTED BY AGFA AND SHOUT! FACTORY)

1988 / DIR: Terence H. Winkless / 89 mins / USA

The quiet town of North Port is being overrun by cockroaches! The sheriff believes that genetic experiments being conducted by the INTEC Corporation are the cause. Confronted with a potential disaster, the city calls for help. When Dr. Hubbard (Terri Treas) from INTEC arrives, she realizes that an innocent experiment has gone terribly wrong. Ordinary cockroaches are turning into creatures with a taste for blood. Worse, the roaches are genetically mutating, becoming whatever — and whoever — they eat! (AGFA)



FEATURE FILMS

OPENING NIGHT / CLOSING NIGHT
& FEATURES

OPENING NIGHT FILM

THE TOXIC AVENGER

2023 / DIR: Macon Blair / 102 mins / USA

A horrible toxic accident transforms downtrodden janitor Winston Gooze into a new evolution of hero: THE TOXIC AVENGER! Now wielding a glowing mop with super-human strength, he must race against time to save his son and stop a ruthless and power-hungry tyrant bent on harnessing toxic superpowers to strengthen his polluted empire. (LEGENDARY)



CLOSING NIGHT FILM

TOTALLY KILLER

2023 / DIR: Nahatchka Khan / 106 mins / USA

35 years after the shocking murder of three teens, the infamous “Sweet Sixteen Killer” returns on Halloween night to claim a fourth victim. 17-year-old Jamie (Kiernan Shipka) ignores her overprotective mom’s (Julie Bowen) warning and comes face to face with the masked maniac and on the run for her life, accidentally time travels back to 1987, the year of the original killings. Forced to navigate the unfamiliar and outrageous culture of the 1980s, Jamie teams up with her teen mom (Olivia Holt) to take down the killer once and for all before she’s stuck in the past forever. (PRIME VIDEO & BLUMHOUSE)





30 COINS (SEASON 2, EPISODES 1 & 2)

2023 / DIR: Álex de la Iglesia / 110 Mins / Produced in Spain for HBO Europe

Most residents of Pedraza, a remote town in Spain plagued by inexplicable, demonic events, have lost their minds and are confined to a psychiatric hospital. Elena (Megan Montaner) lies comatose in a Madrid hospital bed; Paco (Miguel Ángel Silvestre), shattered by remorse, tries to take care of her. As horror intensifies around them, our group of heroes must face a mysterious new enemy (Paul Giamatti) – someone so perverse that even the devil fears him. (HBO EUROPE)

Tags:
EPISODIC



100 YARDS

2023 / DIR: Xu Haofeng & Xu Junfeng / 108 Mins / China

China, 1920. On his deathbed, the Master of the Tianjin martial arts school calls for combat between his son, Shen An (Jacky Heung), and his best apprentice, Qi Quan (Andy On), to determine who will be crowned his successor. When Quan easily bests the son in single, unarmed combat, the apprentice assumes control of the school, and An is humiliated. An looks to his father's second in command, Chairwoman Meng (Li Yuan), for guidance, and she advises him to retreat into civilian life and accept the banking position that his father had arranged for him posthumously. Too prideful to accept defeat, An wages a battle that will expose secrets and traditions long-held sacred by the peacekeeping institution and cause a rift affecting the city well beyond the school's jurisdiction of 100 yards. As An attempts to defy the path laid out for him by his father, he must pummel his way through gangs of hoodlums and rival martial artists, culminating in a meticulously choreographed gauntlet laid out for him by Quan and his violent henchmen. Directed by Xu Junfeng and Xu Haofeng, the latter of whom is best known as the co-writer of Wong Kar Wai's martial arts epic THE GRANDMASTER, 100 YARDS is an atmospheric period drama loaded with breathtaking fight scenes and fluid, kinetic cinematography. (LORI DONNELLY)

Tags:
MARTIAL ARTS | FISTS IN YOUR FACE | DADDY ISSUES





ACID

2023 / DIR: Just Philippot / 99 Mins / France

On probation after beating up a cop during a factory riot, Michal shares custody of his daughter Selma with his ex-wife Elise. Selma is having a hard time adapting to her new boarding school and likes to spend time at her dad's, who informs her of his plans to move to Belgium after the probation ends.

The news reports about acid rains on the other end of the globe don't seem to worry Michal at all, until weird clouds reach France and the rain begins to burn through once-durable materials. Concerned, Michal and Elise rush to the school to pick up their daughter, who barely escapes an acid rain shower. From then on, the family is in a race against the dark clouds overhead, with little in the way of shelter from the pouring acid.

Like in Just Philippot's first feature, *LA NUÉE* (THE SWARM), which unfortunately disappeared in the large catalog of a streaming platform, whose farmed for protein grasshoppers become uncontrollably blood thirsty, Philippot imagines another story about nature gone haywire with *ACID*. Based on the short film with the same title that horrified and entranced Fantastic Fest audiences in 2018, this French disaster movie has a much larger scale and is far more dramatic than the short, with a scene on a bridge that you will have a hard time forgetting.

One of the many French genre movies presented at Cannes this year, *ACID* is a rather bleak movie, not so far-fetched from reality, conveying once more that if we do not correct course with our planet soon, the consequences will be disastrous. (ANNICK MAHNERT)

Tags:
DYSTOPIA | SCI FI



THE ALTMAN METHOD

2022 / DIR: Nadav Aronowicz / 101 Mins / Israel

Nothing is what it seems in *THE ALTMAN METHOD*, a psychological thriller that gives new meaning to the term gaslighting. Interspersed with moments of pitch-black comedy, the film is a multifaceted commentary on the state of the world, the validity of news, and the power of public opinion.

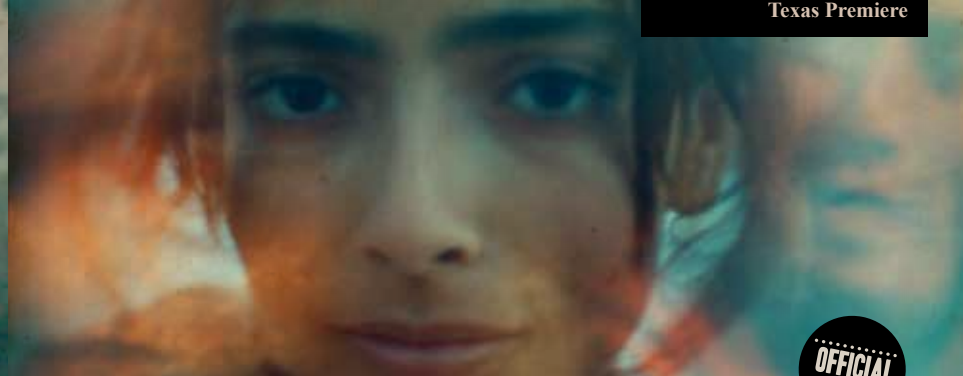
Noa is an actress whose career has slowly dried up as she's aged. Each day brings new disappointment as money issues pile up, sparking tension with her husband, Uri, a charismatic martial arts teacher. Uri's business has also seen better days, and the couple's problems seem inescapable until the unthinkable happens, and Uri kills a terrorist in an act of self-defense.

Suddenly, his business is booming, attracting new students eager to learn "The Altman Method" of self-defense. And Uri is eager to capitalize, spreading his tale of heroism to anyone who will listen. The shocking incident and their newfound success bring the couple back together, but Noa soon begins to discover cracks in Uri's story, and her investigation into the truth opens up a web of lies and deceit.

Featuring nuanced performances and shocking twists and turns, *THE ALTMAN METHOD* is a tightly crafted film guaranteed to spark interesting conversations. (LISA DREYER)

Tags:
DARK COMEDY





THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

2023 / DIR: Thomas Cailley / 130 Mins / France

The world is evolving as a new illness spreads across the globe, slowly mutating humans into animals, including Emile's mother, Lana, who is turning into a wolf. After an incident at home where Emile is injured, Lana's sent to a specialized government treatment center in the south of France, and his father, François, relocates the family to stay close to her. Shortly after arriving, they are informed that the ambulance transporting her has crashed and that Lana has escaped. While François tries to find his wife outside the police patrols, Emile slowly develops strange new behaviors and physical anomalies in his own body.

French genre cinema has certainly reached a new height in the last couple of years, no doubt influenced by the success of Julia Ducournau's RAW and TITANE. More and more producers are taking chances on original scripts, and no one will argue that producing THE ANIMAL KINGDOM in France was a bold move.

It's probably why Romain Duris (one of my favorite French actors) and Adèle Exarchopoulos (Quentin Dupieux's MANDIBLES, BLUE IS THE WARMEST COLOR) came on board the movie. THE ANIMAL KINGDOM is first and foremost a love story, featuring a strong message about segregation and acceptance, but it also pushes you to question whether we're losing our humanity as we turn to our animal instincts.

Thomas Cailley's second feature opened Cannes' Un Certain Regard last May, and it was just one of the many genre films that dominated the Croisette this year. What a year for ambitious French genre cinema! (ANNICK MAHNERT)

Tags:

FANTASY | SCI-FI | DYSTOPIA



ANIMALIA

2023 / DIR: Sofia Alaoui / 91 Mins / France, Morocco, Qatar

Itto comes from a modest background. She's married to Amine, a Moroccan businessman, but his wealthy family, especially his mother, doesn't miss a beat in reminding Itto of her inferior background. One morning, she manages to avoid a family trip to the governor's house by pretending to be tired from her heavy pregnancy. Finally alone, she enjoys the silence and being able to just be herself. However, as a strange storm brews, Amine calls Itto to inform her that the roads have been blocked by the army and that the family is unable to return home.

Amine arranges for his wife to be driven to the next town by their groundskeeper neighbor. But choosing to put his own family's safety first, the man abandons Itto halfway through the journey in a small village. Waiting for her husband to come get her, Itto witnesses strange behavior among the village's stray dogs, forming a bond with a Berger Malinois that in turn chooses to protect her. As Itto decides to try to join her husband on her own, the weird behavior quickly spreads among humans as well.

With stunning cinematography by Noé Bach, ANIMALIA is a wonderful film about class prejudice and finding emancipation in times of change. In her first feature film, French-Moroccan director Sofia Alaoui, who won the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance for her short film SO WHAT IF THE GOATS DIE in 2020, delivers a subtle and sensitive sci-fi tale in which faith and otherworldly forces collide.

Although titled ANIMALIA for its international release, the French title PARMI NOUS translates as "among us," which clearly indicates that, while something unnatural may be spreading in our world... Everything will be fine. (ANNICK MAHNERT)

Tags:

SCI-FI | ARTHOUSE | DYSTOPIA





BABY ASSASSINS 2

2023 / DIR: Hugo Sakamoto / 101 Mins / Japan

On a whim in high school, our favorite pair of assassins joined a gym to get into shape. To no one's surprise, the two haven't gone back since, and now four years of overdue fees must be paid before they lose their membership in their assassin guild. While trying to send a last-minute payment, Chisato and Mahiro's bank is taken hostage, and they miss the deadline. With all their money spent on elaborate sweets, the pair are forced to take part-time jobs while waiting to be reinstated as hired killers. Unfortunately for our free agents, but fortunately for us, two assassins have been tasked with killing them in the meantime.

Our beloved baby assassins make their ice-cream-covered return to Fantastic Fest. As with the first installment, the performances from Saori Izawa and Akari Takaishi literally take the cake, as they struggle with their day jobs while scheming to get good with the guild. Both actresses take the over-the-top humor and ridiculous fight choreography to even greater heights by channeling millennial existentialism into the everyday lives of these low-level assassins, but Izawa in particular gets to use her prodigious experience as a stuntwoman to show off her comedic timing combined with her expert martial arts.

There are more stunts, more kills, more bizarre assassin handbook rules, and a pair of cute boys who want them dead. Welcome back, Chisato and Mahiro. (AUSTIN KING)

Tags:

ACTION | MARTIALARTS | COMEDY



BARK

2023 / DIR: Marc Schölermann / 90 Mins / Germany

Nolan Bentley seems like a nice enough guy caught in a terrible situation after he wakes up one morning tied to a tree, hands behind his back, with neither water nor food at his disposal. After suffering starvation and hunger for a few days, a passing outdoorsman pitches a tent right next to him and strikes up a conversation. As their discussion progresses, it becomes clear to Nolan that the man has no intention of saving him. What's unclear, though, are his reasons for choosing not to intervene.

For those of you who have been troubled by a certain Fantastic Fest death toll over the years (and without giving too much away), this film will settle the score. BARK is a slow burn, and you'll sometimes wonder where the story is going, but I guarantee that the ride is worthwhile and that you'll be more than satisfied by the finale, at which point you'll probably shed a tear.

Revealing itself to be more than just a 'man in the woods' film, BARK is a subtle and tender (yes, tender) story about relationships and companionship. It's also a film about first impressions and just how despicable humans can turn out to be (not that this really comes as a surprise). If I stay vague, there's a very good reason for it.

German director Marc Schölermann has made a name for himself directing numerous commercials and video clips. BARK is his second feature, and even though there are essentially only two characters in the movie, Schölermann does a great job manipulating our feelings for this poor, tied-up guy while managing to keep us hooked and wondering to the bitter end. (ANNICK MAHNERT)

PLAYS WITH: AJE AND BRUJA - SEE PG 114

Tags:

DRAMA | SINGLE LOCATION





BLONDE DEATH (PRESENTED BY BLEEDING SKULL)

1984 / DIR: James Dillinger aka James Robert Baker / 98 Mins / USA

Blondes really do have more fun.

After being held hostage by an escaped serial killer named Link (Jack Catalano), Tammy Lynn Beavert (Sara Lee Wade) transforms from a bubbly, innocent teen to a sex-hungry, gun-wielding merchant of death. Absolutely no one is safe, certainly not some random dude at the beach.

Shot on video for \$2,000 by “James Dillinger” (aka author James Robert Baker) and produced by Los Angeles art collective EZTV, BLONDE DEATH is one part teen ennui melodrama and one hundred parts exploitive chaos. BLONDE DEATH is an in-your-face rampage of sex, drugs, and violence that climaxes with scenes that were secretly filmed inside “Donkeyland” (aka Disneyland).

Satiric, subversive, and gleefully enraged, BLONDE DEATH is a savage blast of underground anarchy and an essential chapter of queer cinema history. (ANNIE CHOI)

Tags:

RESTORATION | QUEER | PUNK ROCK |



BLOOD DINER

1987 / DIR: Jackie Kong / 90 Mins / USA

Uncle Anwar needs a new body. Not for himself, mind you; he seems content enough as a disembodied, telepathic brain in a mason jar. But Jupiter’s finally coming into alignment, and Anwar needs a flawless host for the resurrection of the ancient Lumerian goddess, Sheetar, after failing some twenty years earlier when the police gunned him down on the lawn of his suburban Los Angeles home.

Lacking a body of his own, Anwar is lucky to have a pair of devoted nephews, Mikey and George, who can act as his hands to harvest the perfect parts from an assortment of “immoral girls,” whose leftovers should be just enough for the ritual’s blood buffet... and that’s all before things really get weird.

If there’s one thing Jackie Kong’s BLOOD DINER understands, it’s the prominent role that an endless splatter of goopy practical gore can play in elevating direct-to-video horror to cult classic. Originally conceived as a sequel to Herschell Gordon Lewis’ BLOOD FEAST, the movie is an exercise in ‘80s excess, swerving off onto so many bizarre tangents that it always feels like Kong’s just about to lose her grip on the plot.

Is it gratuitous? Always... but never extraneous to the story that’s being told. In the end, all the disparate parts, including a feud between vegetarian eateries, a ventriloquist dummy in a cowboy hat, and a title bout wrestling match against reigning champ Jimmy Hitler, all purposefully stitch together as seamlessly as Sheetar’s frankensteined corpse. Come for the campy brilliance of the 5-million-year-old occult ritual; stay for the glorious climax featuring a zombified horde of clubbers and a bedazzled, full-torso vagina dentata. (CHRIS LARSEN)

Tags:

BRAIN IN JAR | CULT MOVIE | HORROR





THE BOOK OF SOLUTIONS

2023 / DIR: Michel Gondry / 102 Mins / France

Inspired by Michel Gondry's own disastrous, megalomaniacal experience of making his 2013 feature MOOD INDIGO, the French filmmaker's return to cinema is a thinly veiled portrait of an artist consumed with his own creativity.

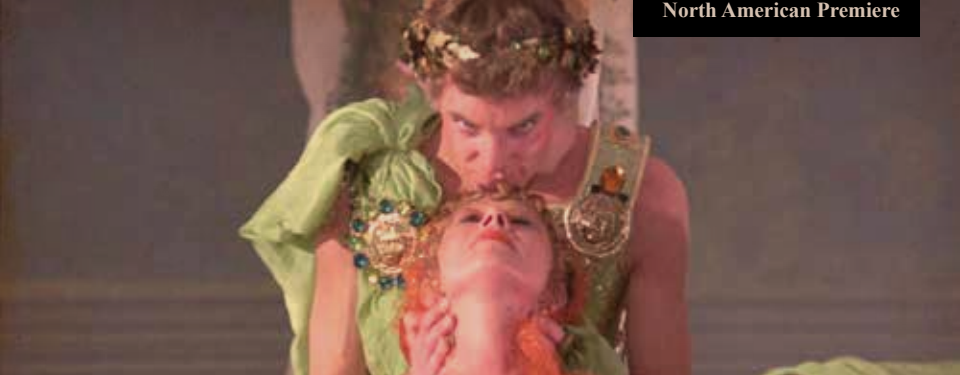
Pierre Niney stars as the well-meaning but utterly insufferable artist-filmmaker Marc, an avatar of Gondry himself earlier in his career. Incapable of taking notes from production executives, he steals the film master and escapes to his aunt's countryside house, with his long-suffering team in tow.

Isolated and high on creativity, he endeavors not just to finish the film on his own terms but to write an infallible, all-encompassing Book of Solutions. In Marc's head, he's creating a manual for solving all the world's creative problems, but in reality, it's a notebook full of charts and drawings unintelligible to anyone beyond their author.

THE BOOK OF SOLUTIONS packs in all the handmade charm of Gondry's earlier work and the hilariously sweet clashing of Niney's Marc with his dedicated but more grounded team. Niney, a lifelong fan of Gondry's work, gives a wired performance that captures the electric charge of inspiration and the depressive lull of reality. (ANNA BOGUTSKAYA)

Tags:

COMEDY | DRAMA | STRUGGLING ARTIST



CALIGULA: THE ULTIMATE CUT

1980 / 173 Mins / USA, Italy

There is nothing tame about Caligula, neither the mad Roman emperor nor the bloated 1979 epic erotic drama he inspired. Initially conceived as a collaboration of the hottest talent around, Gore Vidal as screenwriter, arthouse erotic maestro Tinto Brass directing, financed by pornographer Bob Guccione, and featuring Malcolm McDowell, Helen Mirren, and Peter O'Toole as stars, there was an operatic ambition to the film that, sadly, due to a turbulent production, was never quite realized.

Vidal disowned the film after Brass stopped following the script during production, and the actors barely recognized their characters in the chaotic mess that was ultimately released. For some, however, there has always been a Grand Guignol-esque charm to CALIGULA (artfully described by Mirren herself as "an irresistible mix of art and genitals").

Dubbed upon its original release in 1979 as "a moral Holocaust," producer and art historian Thomas Negovan has taken it upon himself to reassemble CALIGULA as it was intended. Negovan's version, which closely follows the original script and uses footage never before seen by the public, manages to capture glimmers of brilliance.

Full of genitalia, orgies, and brutal violence, this new, ultimate cut Premiered at this year's Cannes Film Festival, bringing down the famed glamor of the festival by approximately 47%. Watching CALIGULA at any point in time is a morally and artistically explosive experience. Watching it on a screen full of people at Fantastic Fest will be positively debauched. (ANNA BOGUTSKAYA)

Tags:

CLASSIC | CULT MOVIE | ORGY ALERT





COBWEB

2023 / DIR: KIM Jee-woon / 132 Mins / South Korea

Bong Joon-ho, Park Chan-wook, Kim Jee-woon... Today's Korean film industry boasts many titans, but all of them stand on the shoulders of the giants that preceded them in the Korean film industry.

They've also all worked many times with the chameleonic *PARASITE* star Song Kang-ho, which makes it all the more fitting that Song should play a wily 1970s-era Korean director in Kim Jee-woon's lively new black comedy-drama *COBWEB*, which is just as twisty and sticky as its title would suggest.

For their fifth collaboration (including past FF favorites *THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE WEIRD* and *THE AGE OF SHADOWS*), Kim and Song bring to life the tale of a filmmaker trying to persuade his studio to reshoot the ending to his already finished film — he's convinced he's this close to delivering a masterpiece.

A passionate producer believes in him, but the same can't be said of everyone else in his orbit, including his prissy actors (some of whom are carrying on affairs with one another), his uncertain staff, and the strict government censors in control of the 1970s Korean film industry who drop by his locked set. This colorful roster of characters is brought to life by a terrific cast of top Korean talent.

Alongside the harried production, *COBWEB* presents the lush and wild film-within-the-film, which lovingly captures the energy and style of yesteryear Korean classics.

Whether Song's fictional Director Kim is really a genius or a B-movie workhorse with delusions of grandeur is one of the many delicious questions that beg to be answered throughout this supremely entertaining and chaotic moviemaking bonanza. (PIERCE CONRAN)

Tags:

COMEDY | DRAMA | STRUGGLING ARTIST



THE COFFEE TABLE

2022 / DIR: Caye Casas / 90 Mins / Spain

María calls the shots in the marriage, from the details of the wedding and the color of their apartment walls to the timing of their recently delivered baby. Now Jesús has decided it's time to take a stand, and if that stand comes in the form of buying the world's tackiest coffee table, a pane of glass held aloft by two gold, naked ladies, then so be it.

"It will change your life!" prophesies the sleazy salesman, and true to his word, the table delivers.

While María goes to the market to prepare for dinner with her emotionally stunted brother-in-law, Carlos, and his latest 18-year-old girlfriend, Cristina, Jesús settles in to tend the baby and admire his newest purchase before everything turns to shit. Muddling around his flat in a state of shock, Jesús tries to keep up appearances for his wife and guests, knowing full well that all sales are final.

Our unlucky couple's trajectory of collapse and disintegration plays off the expectations of a typical domestic drama, while the blood greases the gears for downshifts into horror, suspense, and absurdist black comedy. Not for the faint of heart, *THE COFFEE TABLE*'s taut, withholding style creates a bleak atmosphere of foreboding that will keep you guessing until the final scene. (LORI DONNELLY)

PLAYS WITH: TINY THING - SEE PG 118

Tags:

DARK COMEDY | FAMILY DRAMA





US Premiere



CONANN

2023 / DIR: Bertrand Mandico / 105 Mins / France, Luxembourg, Belgium

Bertrand Mandico is back at Fantastic Fest! After winning Best Film in our Main Competition category in 2021 with his gorgeously surreal epic, AFTER BLUE, the team has been anxiously awaiting his next film, and CONANN does not disappoint. A time-traveling fantasy based loosely on the myth of Conan the Barbarian, Mandico's latest is a gory, frequently funny, visual feast that will please both hardcore fans and newcomers to his work alike.

The film follows the titular Conann throughout various eras, from prehistoric times to a gritty, warped 1980s New York. As she (yes, she!) travels through time, Conann is portrayed by a variety of actresses, highlighting Mandico's penchant for working with and creating boundary-pushing roles for women. Through it all, Conann is accompanied by the bizarre half-dog, half-man mutant, Rainer, played by Mandico's frequent collaborator Elina Löwensohn in a scene-stealing turn.

An engrossing journey across time and space, CONANN sees Mandico expanding and refining his visual language, his usual vivid color palette juxtaposed with scenes shot in black and white. While early scenes resemble a Frank Frazetta illustration brought to life, echoing his earlier films, other time periods take a decidedly different approach, keeping the audience guessing what will come next. Featuring his trademark bizarre humor, phenomenal set pieces, and over-the-top approach to filmmaking, CONANN is a trippy spectacle tailor-made for Fantastic Fest audiences who appreciate the weird and wild. (LISA DREYER)

Tags:
FANTASY | QUEER



Texas Premiere



CONCRETE UTOPIA

2023 / DIR: UM Tae-hwa / 130 Mins / South Korea

For decades, living in a new apartment in a high-rise has been the ultimate Korean dream. Apartment blocks now dominate the Seoul skyline, but in director UM Tae-hwa's gripping disaster drama CONCRETE UTOPIA, an earthquake levels most of the city, leaving a single high-rise standing.

Still holding on to their dream, the residents of the building now band together to keep the newly homeless hordes out. An unlikely figure rises up to lead them in their fight for survival, but as their dystopian micro-society evolves, new dangers appear from without and within.

Dark, amusing, and at times unbearably tense, this ferocious parable about Korea's unique relationship with class and real estate raises the bar for disaster dramas and is destined to go down as a classic of the genre.

In a manic and inspired turn, screen legend Lee Byung-hun (I SAW THE DEVIL) lights up the screen as the unwitting new leader of this band of real estate survivors in one of the most memorable roles in his already storied career. He leads a cast that also includes Korean star Park Seo-joon (soon to make his Hollywood debut in THE MARVELS) who plays a young husband torn between his wife's morality and the safety of being a useful cog in the building's new social machine.

This metaphorical dystopia, which is based on a webtoon, is so rich with ideas that the people behind it have hatched an entire cinematic universe around it, with a connected series (CONCRETE MARKET) and film (THE WILDERNESS, starring THE ROUNDUP's Ma Dong-seok) already in the can. (PIERCE CONRAN)

Tags:
DYSTOPIA | SCI-FI | ACTION





THE CREATOR

2023 / DIR: Gareth Edwards / 133 Mins / USA

From director/co-writer Gareth Edwards (ROGUE ONE, GODZILLA) comes an epic sci-fi action thriller set amidst a future war between the human race and the forces of artificial intelligence. Joshua (John David Washington), a hardened ex-special forces agent grieving the disappearance of his wife (Gemma Chan), is recruited to hunt down and kill the Creator, the elusive architect of advanced AI who has developed a mysterious weapon with the power to end the war... and mankind itself. Joshua and his team of elite operatives journey across enemy lines, into the dark heart of AI-occupied territory, only to discover the world-ending weapon he's been instructed to destroy is an AI in the form of a young child. (MADELEINE YUMA VOYLES)

Tags:
SCI FI



CRUMB CATCHER

2023 / DIR: Chris Skotchdopole / 103 Mins / USA

Everyone has a world-changing invention in them. Enter... THE CRUMB CATCHER! A revolutionary device that will never allow your dinner conversation to sour due to a waiter's interruptions... Or so claims the inventor, John (John Speridakos), an over-eager server who knocks at the door of newlyweds Shane (Rigo Garay) and Leah (Ella Rae Peck) in the middle of the night.

Armed with his proprietary and precious design and with his surly wife Rose (Lorraine Farris) by his side, John insists that the couple hear his pitch. Things are already tense between rich girl Leah, a rising star in publishing, and aspiring writer Shane, and they're only made worse as the interruption quickly escalates in intensity.

Starring Rigo Garay, written and directed by Chris Skotchdopole, and produced by Larry Fessenden, CRUMB CATCHER is a chamber piece that melds extreme anxiety with the worst salesmanship imaginable. Every single character is hilariously despicable in their own way, and each motivated by selfishness and ego.

Operating at a high level of cringe from scene to scene, CRUMB CATCHER leads us down a road of lies and betrayal, culminating in the film's hilariously bleak final act. (ANNA BOGUTSKAYA)

Tags:
HORROR | DARK COMEDY





THE CULT OF AGFA TRAILER SHOW (PRESENTED BY AGFA)

2023 / DIR: Joseph A. Ziemba and Bret Berg / 77 Mins / USA

Step into the multiplex from Dimension X.

There's nothing dreamier than the moment when the lights go down and the show begins. Now imagine capturing that feeling for 77 Mins of concentrated bliss. Exploding from the vaults of the American Genre Film Archive (AGFA), THE CULT OF AGFA TRAILER SHOW is a sequel to THE AGFA HORROR TRAILER SHOW... and AGFA's wildest mixtape yet.

This is a hallucinogenic journey through the most face-kicking, slime-slinging, fret-shredding cult film trailers that the unworld has ever seen. Meticulously constructed by the mad scientists at AGFA to resemble an otherworldly night at a mall multiplex, this compilation features rare trailers, commercials, and ephemera, all of which were preserved and scanned exclusively for this project.

Join the AGFA team in person for the world Premiere of THE CULT OF AGFA TRAILER SHOW on a newly struck 35mm print. (AGFA)

Tags:
AGFA



THE DEEP DARK

2023 / DIR: Mathieu Turi / 100 Mins / France

Set in 1956, Amir leaves his home country of Morocco out of financial necessity. He's sent to Pas-de-Calais to work in the worst mine in France, known as the Devil's Island. Shortly after his orientation, he's assigned to a group that has been ordered to accompany a professor under the pretense of collecting samples.

But once they're down in the deep dark, it quickly becomes clear that the professor has another agenda and that he's looking for something quite different. When the miners blow up a gallery to access an older mine that had been condemned a century earlier, they uncover a secret chamber filled with traces of an ancient civilization. As the miners realize that the discovery will result in the mine's closure, greed leads them to do the unthinkable, thus dooming the entire expedition.

After having served as an assistant director on films from renowned directors including Quentin Tarantino, Stephen Sommers, Guy Ritchie, and Luc Besson, French-born Mathieu Turi directed his first feature, HOSTILE, in 2017 with the help of Xavier Gens [FRONTIÈRE(S), THE DIVIDE], followed by MÉANDRE in 2020.

In THE DEEP DARK, Turi plunges us into a coal mine hell, forcing us down claustrophobic tunnels that the light of day will never reach. Peppared with some Lovecraftian and ancient civilization elements, Turi's latest is the perfect nightmare for nyctophobes. (ANNICK MAHNERT)

Tags:
HORROR | SCI-FI



DIVINITY

2023 / DIR: Eddie Alcazar / 88 Mins / USA

Mad scientist Jaxxon Pierce (Stephen Dorff) has achieved his singular, obsessive quest by perfectly refining “Divinity” a serum created by his late father (Scott Bakula) that bestows both a god-like physique and immortality upon its users. The downsides? Rampant infertility and an entirely commercialized, undying society based exclusively on an excess of physical pleasure.

As Pierce prepares to host a birthday blowout at his remote compound in the desert, two brothers materialize from pods in the sky, infiltrate his home, and forcibly flood his system with massive amounts of the drug. The revelers, including his own handgun-toting brother, continue to party obliviously as Pierce painfully mutates into a grotesque monster.

Elsewhere in the universe, a group of revolutionaries led by Ziva (Bella Thorne) track the location of a rare fertile woman to Pierce’s home and travel to Earth to save her. These factions converge in an explosive finale filmed using director Eddie Alcazar’s “Metascope” technique, an intricate layering of stop-motion and live-action filming.

Shot in raw black and white 16mm, DIVINITY is a unique visual spectacle that subverts the sleek, macho sci-fi action of ‘90s Albert Pyun with a strong dose of gender politics and an experimental, industrial sensibility. Punctuated by a pulsating soundtrack from DJ Muggs, and executive produced by Steven Soderbergh, DIVINITY is a wildly ambitious, lo-fi post-apocalyptic satire. (LORI DONNELLY)

PLAYS WITH: SABORRRR! - SEE PG 117

Tags:

BAKULA | DYSTOPIA | SCI-FI | STOP MOTION



DOOR

1988 / DIR: Banmei Takahashi / 94 Mins / Japan

With her husband working increasingly long hours at the office and their young son off at school, Yasuko spends her days alone, running errands and preparing meals for her family. Throughout the day, she must fend off a barrage of phone and house calls from a variety of determined salesmen, but when one such interaction ends with Yasuko inadvertently trapping a particularly pushy peddler’s hand in her door, his vengeful wrath escalates to unspeakable levels.

Through his endlessly creative framing of Yasuko’s domestic prison, deeply unsettling and alienating sound design, and the relentlessly breezy, jazz-infused city pop score, director Banmei Takahashi ratchets up the tension in a slow-burn masterclass that erupts in an explosive third act of unbridled insanity. Keiko Takahashi, the director’s wife and frequent onscreen muse, is absolutely mesmerizing as Yasuko, a lonely, unassuming, and sexually frustrated heroine whose single solitary sanctuary away from the fast-evolving fears of urban life is violated by Daijirô Tsutsumi’s loathsome manifestation of Japan’s economic boom.

DOOR has long flown under the radar of international fans, lost amidst the endless swathes of 1980s V-Cinema weirdness, despite it spawning two sequels, with DOOR III directed by J-horror hero Kiyoshi Kurosawa (CURE, PULSE). We are delighted to have this opportunity to introduce an almost completely unknown Asia Extreme classic to a new generation of genre aficionados, who are sure to fall under its dizzying spell as readily as we have. Delight in the abundance of glorious ‘80s kitsch, revel in the craziness of its unhinged climax, and recoil in terror every time the phone or doorbell rings, as it just might be the cold call from hell. (JAMES MARSH)

Tags:

RESTORATION | HORROR | PEVERTED STALKER





EILEEN

2023 / DIR: William Oldroyd / 97 Mins / USA

Set during a bitter 1964 Massachusetts winter, young secretary Eileen becomes enchanted by the glamorous new counselor at the prison where she works. Their budding friendship takes a twisted turn when Rebecca reveals a dark secret, throwing Eileen onto a sinister path. (NEON)

Tags:
THRILLER



ENTER THE CLONES OF BRUCE

2023 / DIR: David Gregory / 94 Mins / USA

WHAAAAAAA! WATAAAHHH! AAAAAYYYYYY!

You'd be hard pressed to find another actor who could be identified based on just a few yelps, but somehow, immediately, you know the man I'm referring to here.

Although Bruce Lee's best-known films, *THE BIG BOSS*, *FIST OF FURY*, and *THE WAY OF THE DRAGON*, weren't produced for audiences outside of Hong Kong, his cool blend of rakish charm and unparalleled martial arts skill caught the attention of the global market and quickly established him as an international star. When he died in 1973, it left an indelible mark on a genre that was just beginning to establish itself, and film studios around the world jumped into the fray to capitalize on Lee's incomparable presence, giving birth to a kung fu subgenre, Bruceploitation.

From spitting-image clones like Dragon Lee in South Korea and Bruce Le in Myanmar to spiritual successors like Blaxploitation icon Jim Kelly and the pioneering "Lady Kung Fu" Angela Mao, the ripple effect of the Dragon's death lasted over a decade, spawning countless careers and hundreds of movies.

ENTER THE CLONES OF BRUCE tracks down producers, scholars, aficionados, and some of the movement's biggest stars, all skilled martial artists in their own right, as they reminisce over a bygone era of gonzo plotlines, shoestring budgets, and questionable taste. (LORI DONNELLY)

Tags:
DOCUMENTARY | BRUCEPLOITATION





THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER (EPISODES 1 & 2)

2023 / DIR: Mike Flanagan / 120 Mins / USA

In this wicked series based on the works of Edgar Allan Poe, ruthless siblings Roderick and Madeline Usher have built Fortunato Pharmaceuticals into an empire of wealth, privilege and power. But past secrets come to light when the heirs to the Usher dynasty start dying at the hands of a mysterious woman from their youth. (NETFLIX)

Tags:
EPISODIC



FALLING STARS

2023 / DIR: Richard Karpala & Gabriel Biencyzki / 80 Mins / USA

Each year, on a fateful night in late October, witches use the darkness as cover to descend to earth to harvest those caught outside without protection. The authorities have put a curfew in place to limit the disappearances. Despite the warnings, three brothers leave the house to see the body of a witch, shot down by a friend who buried her in the desert.

After confirming the very strict rules about how to behave around the body, the friend and the brothers unearth the witch. But when the youngest brother accidentally desecrates the corpse, he triggers a chain reaction that endangers his closest loved ones. Now, no one is safe from the Harvest.

In their first feature film, directors Richard Karpala and Gabriel Biencyzki skillfully reinvent the witch genre and deliver a riveting tale about four friends whose curiosity leads to their demise. Far from a sensational Hollywood movie with multimillion-dollar VFX, Karpala and Biencyzki have opted to use editing and camera angles as their primary tools to create the movie's most frightful moments.

Self-produced by the duo, and with Biencyzki also handling the cinematography, the directors prove once again that you don't necessarily need a huge amount of cash to make a strong and original movie. You just need to surround yourself with the right people, all heading in the same direction. FALLING STARS is a little gem of American indie cinema and the first feature film from great directors in the making. (ANNICK MAHNERT)

PLAYS WITH: THE 200 PHENOMENA OF CALGARY, ALBERTA, CANADA - SEE PG 114

Tags:
FANTASTIC | DRAMA





THE FANTASTIC GOLEM AFFAIRS

2023 / DIR: Burnin' Percebes / 97 Mins / Spain

Homeroicism and magical realism take center stage in the Spanish comedy *THE FANTASTIC GOLEM AFFAIRS*. Amidst a drunken game of charades atop an apartment building, Juan watches his childhood best friend slip and fall before shattering into a million pieces like a porcelain doll. Overcome with grief and confused by the strange set of circumstances during and immediately following his friend's death, Juan sets out to uncover a queer world of clay companions and a computer algorithm that determines how each person will die.

THE FANTASTIC GOLEM AFFAIRS caught the eye of our programming team for its absurdist humor and attention to film craft. Using handmade sets, color-blocked costumes, and rear projection, directors Juan González and Nando Martínez create a science fiction world that evokes the aesthetics of a technicolor musical. The directors build a comedic layer of artifice that allows the surprise violence and existential deaths to seem as ordinary as checking your latest tweet for likes.

Juan is played brilliantly by Brays Efe, a perpetual bachelor and layabout beefcake who realizes his life is missing something when his best and only friend smashes to smithereens. Efe is the straight man, in terms of comedy and sexuality, who investigates his deceased friend's world of hidden golems and leather daddies.

As the world grows increasingly mad around him and Juan finds himself burdened by unexpected responsibility, his happy-go-lucky facade crumbles into a search for connection in a world where technology is the default solution to emotional dissatisfaction.

I must also mention Bruna Cusi's scene-stealing performance as Juan's love interest, lawyer, and potential business partner. Cusi embodies the fast-talking, no-nonsense businesswoman with welcome empathy and warmth, giving her tough approach a depth of physical comedy and incisive punchline delivery.

Blood splatters and penis shots abound in what is sure to be one of the funniest theatrical experiences of our 2023 program. (AUSTIN KING)

PLAYS WITH: *THE DREAM OF THE SONGSTRESS* - SEE PG 115

Tags:

COMEDY | QUEER



FOUND FOOTAGE FESTIVAL VOL. 10

2023 / DIR: Joe Pickett & Nick Prueher / 85 Mins / USA

Joe Pickett (*THE ONION*) and Nick Prueher (*LATE SHOW*) take you on a guided tour through their latest and greatest VHS finds, including a video dating tape for women in 1987, a striptease video called "Males In Motion," and a mysterious New Age seminar called "Elimination: The First Step." (NICK PRUEHER)

Tags:

COMEDY | FOUND FOOTAGE





FOUR'S A CROWD

2022 / DIR: Álex de la Iglesia / 100 Mins / Spain

Julián, an Uber driver, is in love with Lorena, one of his recurring customers. On his next trip, he's hoping to bare his soul to Lorena, but before he's able to, two more passengers board the car, Rodrigo is an entitled businessman, and Carlos is a super handsome young man who travels using a fake Uber profile.

Lorena quickly connects with Carlos, which triggers an aggressive jealousy in Julián. When Rodrigo starts a brawl in a gas station, the entire trip takes a turn for the worse, and the four passengers are stuck with each other to their final destination: Madrid. The simple ride becomes a 300 km-long nightmare. Oh, and more than one passenger is not who they claim to be.

FOUR'S A CROWD is an anomaly in this year's lineup. It's a straight-forward comedy. But we all know that comedy in the hands of Spanish legend Álex de la Iglesia will make you squirm in your seat. The characters, brilliantly played by a first-class ensemble, are tuned like an orchestra to complete one another, and the harmony that ensemble creates is a perfect combination of outrage, drama, and silliness, leading to a climax that will make you laugh out loud.

Álex de la Iglesia is a very versatile director who perfectly understands human nature and always manages to put a finger on what triggers us as viewers. After this movie, you'll never want to share a long drive with unknown people again. (ANNICK MAHNERT)

Tags:
COMEDY



I'LL CRUSH Y'ALL

2023 / DIR: Kike Narcea / 92 Mins / Spain

Just released from parole and determined to leave his former life of crime, Gabriel, nicknamed Nuthead, moves back to his family farm to care for his ailing father, find a job that doesn't involve falling back in with his old crew, and stay far, far away from his old flame, Mónica.

Unfortunately, Nuthead's father doesn't last long, and he's left to manage both his grief and the farm alone. When his brother gets caught up in a mob deal gone wrong, the former criminal will be forced to return to his violent past and defend the homestead from the threats coming his way.

I'LL CRUSH Y'ALL is a showcase for Mario Mayo's Nuthead (prompting one of our programmers to dub him "the Spanish Jason Statham") and for Rut Santamaría as his slingshot-wielding partner, Mónica. They punch, tackle, kick, and shoot their way through the waves of gangsters trying to take them down, getting into some screwball romantic comedy hijinks along the way, but mostly they just kill guys.

Mayo is an intense presence on screen, believably embodying a heavyweight boxing champion with underground connections, and Santamaría brings physical comedy to the fight choreography's free-for-all action, accompanied by some standout German Shepherds. I'LL CRUSH Y'ALL is a no-nonsense brawler where the only thing nastier than these characters' morals are the fights they get into. (AUSTIN KING)

PLAYS WITH: NO KEY - SEE PG 117

Tags:
FISTS IN YOUR FACE | COMEDY





INFESTED (AKA VERMIN)

2023 / dir: Sébastien Vaniček / 100 Mins / France

30-year-old Kaleb is a small-time grifter with a passion for small critters. His room is filled with vivariums, and he makes money by selling sneakers to the residents of his building situated in the French suburbs. When he finds a big exotic spider for sale in the back office of his friend Ali's shop, Kaleb is mesmerized and acquires the arachnid.

Stored temporarily in a humid shoebox, the spider ends up crawling out a tiny hole in the cardboard. When Kaleb finds out the spider is missing, he barricades his room in the hopes of containing it, intending to look for it later, but the venomous arachnid has a mind of its own and quickly wreaks havoc in the building, endangering all the tenants.

In his first feature film, director Sébastien Vaniček plunges us into the nightmare of a building under arachnid attack. If you're an arachnophobe, you should avoid the film. If you're an arachnophobic masochist, then INFESTED is for you. Because of course, who's afraid of ONE spider? It wouldn't be fun if it was just about one tiny little spider... right?

By setting up a group of people in a rundown building with almost no way out and then filling that space with rapidly reproducing venomous spiders, Vaniček will make your skin (and not just the spiders) crawl. (ANNICK MAHNERT)

PLAYS WITH: LAST WORDS - SEE PG 116

Tags:
ARACHNIDS | HORROR



IN MY MOTHER'S SKIN

2023 / dir: Kenneth Dagatan / 97 Mins / Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan

IN MY MOTHER'S SKIN opens with a Filipino family living under Japanese occupation in the waning days of World War II. Uncertain of the future, the family's father has stashed stolen gold with the hope of retrieving it after the war but must leave his family in search of help. His daughter, Tala, is left at home to care for her ailing mother and younger brother.

While playing in the woods, the young protagonist encounters an ancient shrine inhabited by a beautiful fairy creature who offers to help the young girl with her mother's sickness and the family's dwindling food supplies. Desperate for any kindness, Tala accepts the fairy's gifts, but there is a steep price to be paid for survival.

A grotesque fairy tale and scathing indictment of imperialism, Kenneth Dagatan's feature offers plenty of goopy, bloody flesh-eating and long, creepy tongues to go along with its big ideas. This atmospheric horror movie features an antagonist with a costume so phenomenal, you might just find yourself taking her side. Sure, she's leading this family down a violent path, but look at that fabulous headdress.

This Sundance Selection is anchored by an incredible performance from Felicity Kyle Napuli as Tala, who brings a vulnerability and desire for hope so human that you'll forgive her unquestioning trust in the first being to offer her salvation. IN MY MOTHER'S SKIN is a sure recommendation for fans of Guillermo del Toro or violent dismemberment. (AUSTIN KING)

Tags:
HORROR





THE INVISIBLE FIGHT

2023 / DIR: Rainer Sarnet / 115 Mins / Estonia, Latvia, Greece, Finland

Rafeal is the sole survivor of an attack on a Soviet outpost. Inspired by the three martial artists who easily dispatched the other guards on duty with him, Rafeal decides to learn kung fu. Unfortunately for him, “everything cool” is banned in the USSR, and he’ll have to seek martial arts teachers at one of the unlikely places: the local Eastern Orthodox monastery.

With a disapproving mother, a rival monk/kung fu student, and a possible girlfriend pulling him in separate directions, Rafael will have to resolve his calling to kung fu mastery at the monastery, suppressing his heavy metal, rebellious nature to subvert all authority, in order to unlock the greatest martial art of all.

THE INVISIBLE FIGHT features over-the-top costuming and production design, a quick wit, and monks fighting. Each action setpiece feels unique, using the Orthodox monastery setting to its full potential with fun takes on martial arts movie staples like doing chores as a beginner’s training tool or harnessing one’s inner self to unlock your full potential.

The movie’s best regional adaptation is probably its take on the stock character of the old, ailing master looking for a successor. Nafanail (Indrek Sammul) is the monastery’s greatest monk and martial artist, and he enjoys overseasoning his food, asking his students difficult questions about the origin of sin, and spending time with his monk boyfriend. In addition to being a key figure in the narrative and comedic setpieces, Nafanail is a teacher, a theologian, and politically outspoken. He also gets the best fight in the movie.

Director Rainer Sarnet harnesses the action movie history THE INVISIBLE FIGHT needs, in particular the Chinese wuxia roots, and uses this to tell a Northern European story. Explicitly referencing genre classics like ENTER THE DRAGON, the film does not rest on just being a comedy or an action fan’s game of “spot the reference,” but asks questions about faith, spiritual duty, and the modern state of Russia and Europe. And if that all sounds too serious, don’t worry. There are monks flying on wires through Orthodox cathedrals.

(AUSTIN KING)

Tags:



JACKDAW

2023 / DIR: Jamie Childs / 97 Mins / UK

Jack Dawson is a man of focus, commitment, and sheer fucking will, but “Jackdaw” has fallen on tough times. Unexpectedly finding himself the sole caretaker of his younger brother after a family tragedy, he desperately needs some fast cash to finance their future. When he gets a call from an old contact named Silas to make an open-water pickup at a dinghy deep in Britain’s North Sea, he reluctantly accepts the job.

Equipped with a special skill set as a veteran of the British army and as a former motocross champion, Jackdaw resurrects his childhood dirt bike for a job that he anticipates will be a quick pickup and dropoff. When he finds out that he’s been double-crossed and that there is no cash, he’s enraged, but when he arrives home and finds his brother missing, he’s terrified.

Noted television director Jamie Childs’ feature debut is a swiftly paced, atmospheric crime thriller set in the dark streets of a depressed English Rust Belt town, where the high-tech turbines that dot the North Sea stand in teasing contrast to the rural farms, rundown factories, and dangerous young men that stand in his path. Reminiscent of some of the ‘70s finest, with leading man Oliver Jackson-Cohen channeling the stoic charisma of Steve McQueen in his prime, JACKDAW barrels forward, never taking its foot off the gas. (LORI

DONNELLY)

Tags:

ACTION | MOTOCROSS DOUBLE-CROSS | RAVES





THE JAR (CHARON)

1984 / DIR: Bruce Tusciano / 85 Mins / USA

On a dark and stormy night, Paul's car collides with another driven by an old man. Disoriented and refusing medical care, Paul takes the man back to his apartment to rest. When the man mysteriously disappears, he leaves behind a jar with a devilish-looking blue creature inside, and Paul is soon overcome with disturbing hallucinations. Tangled up in odd scenarios, he encounters a host of peculiar characters, including a neighbor who takes pity on his condition.

A film that hinges less on plot points, *THE JAR* instead invests in creating atmospherics with a stylistic and tonal (in)coherence. A deeply personal psychodrama with an emphasis on dream-like imagery and landscapes, Paul wanders unconsciously from one strange encounter to the next. The stilted, amateurish performances, the banal, deliberate abstraction, and the hodgepodge of cultural and literary touchstones each lend themselves to an uncanny alchemy that is simultaneously creepy, disturbing, funny, sentimental, and absurd.

If you're looking for a more traditional movie-going experience, *THE JAR* is bound to leave you frustrated (a quick look at Letterboxd can attest to the dismay), but if you're willing to surrender to its idiosyncratic rhythm and go-for-broke conceptualism, you may have one of the most unique viewing experiences at the fest this year. At the very least, you'll have something to talk about.

Restored in 4K by the folks at Terror Vision from a partial camera negative and the personal print of director Bruce Tusciano, *THE JAR* is sure to generate discussion on both sides of the aisle. (LORI DONNELLY)

Tags:

RESTORATION | SURREAL | DEMON IN A JAR



KENNEDY

2023 / DIR: Anurag Kashyap / 144 Mins / India

Ruthless, efficient, and totally without conscience, Kennedy exists on society's margins as a contract killer for Mumbai's Police Commissioner Khan with the sole hope of exacting vengeance on Saleem, the man who murdered his son.

Once known as Uday Shetty, a cop possessing a taste for violence that shook even his own colleagues, Kennedy faked his own death with the help of his fellow officers to avoid drawing negative attention to the corrupt unit after an interrogation went too far. Now Khan harnesses Kennedy's natural gifts for his own purpose, dangling the whereabouts of his nemesis, Saleem, from one brutal kill to the next.

As Kennedy wrestles with the demons of his past, his usual discretion and attention to detail begin to falter, attracting unwanted heat to a police department whose extortion racket is already stretched thin by the COVID lockdowns. A marked man yet again, Kennedy prepares for a final nihilistic showdown where no one will leave unscathed.

Director Anurag Kashyap returns to the pulpy art-crime realm of his epic *GANGS OF WASSEYPUR*, channeling some of the genre's Premiere stylists (Mann, Melville, and Sollima, to name a few), while brandishing his own uniquely downbeat atmosphere and not-so-subtle critique of India's most powerful institutions. *KENNEDY* is a gritty potboiler for those who like their crime movies raw and violent. (LORI DONNELLY)

Tags:

ACTION | THRILLER | HIGH BODY COUNT





KILL

2023 / DIR: Nikhil Nagesh Bhat / 108 Mins / India

Army commando Amrit (played by Lakshya, an actor to keep an eye on) has just finished a mission off the grid, and he's looking forward to spending his time off-duty with his girlfriend, Tullika. Unaware of their clandestine relationship, Tullika's father has arranged a marriage to another man. She's set to travel back to New Delhi by train with her family the next morning.

Strong headed Amrit is not going to just stand by, and he boards the train with his best bud, another commando named Viresh, in the hopes of getting her back and proposing to her. The plans are rapidly shattered by a group of 40 violent, blade-wielding thugs led by Fani (handsome Raghav Juyal), who have boarded the train to relieve the passengers of their precious belongings. Amrit and Viresh are men of action, and they're not going to just sit and watch. Let the skull crushing begin.

For all our audience members who cheered for PROJECT WOLF HUNTING and squirmed in their seats during THE RAID, this new film, written and directed by Indian director Nikhil Nagesh Bhat, is for you. This is probably the first Indian film of its kind, and it's BRUTAL! With all the action and close combat taking place in the confined spaces of a few train cars, Bhat makes sure that every piece of furniture and every prop at hand is used to crush some bones or puncture some organs... including a fire extinguisher.

KILL is fast-paced, and the action choreography (signed by Se-yeong Oh and Parvez Shaikh) is brutal. With some very dramatic key scenes serving as gear shifts, Bhat turns up the dial on savagery throughout the film, to the delight of the audience. (ANNICK MAHNERT)

Tags:



KILL DOLLY KILL

2023 / DIR: Heidi Moore / 79 Mins / USA

Tromaville's local celebrity murderess, Dolly Deadly, is a shoo-in to win Serial Killer of the Year. Unfortunately, Slasharella has designs on the title and will stoop to the lowest of lows to take the crown. The two will drag Tromaville out and turn it upside down in their fight to the death, decimating the fictional city's population all along the way.

When reviewing movies for Fantastic Fest, there's always a moment when I find something really special that I cannot wait to share with as many people as possible. KILL DOLLY KILL is one of those special movies. Drag is under attack from all directions, to say nothing of the vicious and disgusting anti-trans legislation being considered around the country, including by our own Texas legislature.

KILL DOLLY KILL channels the rage and frustration of our current climate into a rock musical against all good taste. This is a John Waters-influenced serial killer comedy with drag queens galore and plenty of grisly deaths for the people who want queer folks back in the closet or worse. Watching this movie will have you laughing till you cry and cheering on every act of heinous violence.

If you are looking for a nice, palatable film for the heterosexual world, this is not that movie. Forget your morals and decency, embrace bloody death and dismemberment, shield your tender bits, and bring your most outlandish wigs and longest nails to Fantastic Fest's world Premiere of KILL DOLLY KILL. (AUSTIN KING)

Tags:

COMEDY | QUEER | GROSS OUT |





KILLING ROMANCE

2023 / DIR: LEE Won-suk / 107 Mins / South Korea

A fallen actress falls in love with a man, but when he turns out to be a monster, her next-door überfan helps her escape the only way they know how, by trying to kill him.

Director LEE Won-suk's kaleidoscopic and pop-infused works have delighted fans ever since he appeared on the scene with the giddily inventive, cult Korean romcom *HOW TO USE GUYS WITH SECRET TIPS* a decade ago. *KILLING ROMANCE*, a triumphant return that sees him build on all his early promise and then some, is an absurdist karaoke musical in love with B-movies and classic K-pop, not to mention surly ostriches and bottomless fermented soy bean soup.

Rejected by local critics earlier this year before quickly being embraced by a fanatical group of followers (just like *SAVE THE GREEN PLANET!* twenty years ago), this cult phenomenon has the rare ability to surprise, move, and delight its audience from start to finish and only improves on repeat viewings.

This isn't his first karaoke musical (that would be his side-splitting short *LALA LAND*, which we screened in 2018), but here LEE refines the subgenre and makes it his own, not unlike what Brian De Palma did with his rock horror-musical *PHANTOM OF THE PARADISE*.

PARASITE's Lee Sun-kyun is a scream as the mustachioed tyrant Jon Na, and Lee Ha-nee is the indefatigable dynamo who powers this furious 'anti-romance' as Hwang Yeo-rae, his unwilling trophy wife.

"It's goood!" Jon constantly affirms, and who are we to disagree? (PIERCE CONRAN)

Tags:

MUSICAL | COMEDY | DRAMA



KIM'S VIDEO

2023 / DIR: David Redmon & Ashley Sabin / 86 Mins / USA, UK, France

David Redmon is on a mission to rescue a legendary video collection, and lucky for us, he brought his camera along for the odyssey. When the New York video rental store Kim's Video closed down, its vast collection of everything from bootlegged Godard to vintage porn was moved to the Sicilian city of Salemi. The owner of the shuttered rental store, Yongman Kim, made this deal with the agreement that the former patrons of his video store would be able to access the collection at any time. The city also agreed to begin digitizing the collection to allow worldwide access.

None of this ever happened.

This Sundance selection crosses continents and languages to track down this physical media jackpot and fulfill its original intent as a cinematic archive. As David tries to hold the people who have the collection accountable, he will break laws and decorum while using a vast amount of film references and clips to reveal the history of this revered video store and to understand his own cinephilia.

KIM'S VIDEO is a striking documentary that asks difficult questions around the ownership of art and the public duty of cinema and its gatekeepers. For any Fantastic Fest attendee who enjoys burning through the strangest basement VHS tapes on a long weekend marathon, *KIM'S VIDEO* is a must-see. (AUSTIN KING)

Tags:

DOCUMENTARY | CINEPHILES | CAPER





THE LAST STOP IN YUMA COUNTY

2023 / DIR: Francis Galluppi / 90 Mins / USA

A traveling knife salesman sips coffee and works through a day-old crossword puzzle in the hottest diner in Arizona while waiting for the fuel truck to refill the pump at the last gas station for a hundred miles. After delivering a half-hearted sales pitch to Charlotte, the establishment's owner and only waitress, he realizes that the suspicious men who've sauntered in are driving the distinctive car reported to have escaped a million-dollar heist.

Forced to stop for a fill-up before hightailing it to Mexico, Travis and his ruthless older brother, Beau, would prefer the convenience of killing both Charlotte and the salesman when they realize they've been identified. Instead, they're forced to make an uneasy truce to keep up appearances until the tardy fuel truck arrives with the desperately needed resources. The town's other denizens trickle in, including the kindly gas station attendant, a local rancher who owns a spread down the way, an older couple of busybodies, a young couple straight out of BADLANDS, and a hapless county deputy who works with Charlotte's husband, the sheriff of Yuma County.

As the temperature rises and the pressure builds, our knife salesman makes a fateful decision that will change his life forever. What's a four-letter word for, "Take the money and run?"

Equal parts western and heist thriller, writer/director Francis Galluppi's debut feature harnesses the energy of the stripped-down action B-movies of the 1970s and distills it into a wry chamber piece rife with acerbic dialogue, tense standoffs, and memorable double-crosses. (LORI DONNELLY)

Tags:

ACTION | WESTERN | STANDOFF | HEIST



THE LAST VIDEO STORE

2023 / DIR: Cody Kennedy & Tim Rutherford / 83 Mins / Canada

Kevin is the owner and sole employee of Blaster Video, Canada's last video store. Nyla, the daughter of his most loyal customer, not only returns her father's rentals two weeks late without the courtesy of a rewind, but she also unwittingly unleashes the video necronomicon, a cursed VHS tape imbued with the power to bring any movie character to life in the real world.

Now Kevin and Nyla are trapped in Blaster Video, thrown into a fight for their lives against a formidable variety of B-movie foes, including Castor, the legendary hockey goalie turned supernatural thriller killer from the BEAVER LAKE MASSACRE franchise, and Jackson Viper, a horny, go-it-alone, overly emotional rogue detective who, sprung straight from the clearance bin, looks for payback after Kevin deems his latest action movie a flop.

As Kevin's meticulously constructed world turns against him, he finds himself an unlikely hero in his toughest battle since the Format Wars.

With a setting based on star Kevin Martin's beloved cult video store The Lobby, THE LAST VIDEO STORE is a loving homage to the homegrown Canuxploitation, direct-to-video '90s sci-fi, and the rough-hewn potboilers that adorn its shelves. The feature debut of directing duo Cody Kennedy and Tim Rutherford, who produced a bunch of outrageous shorts filmed at The Lobby under the moniker House of Heathens, THE LAST VIDEO STORE is genre cinema lovingly crafted by true aficionados. (LORI DONNELLY)

PLAYS WITH: FORGOTTEN LAKE - SEE PG 116

Tags:

HORROR | COMEDY | CANUCKSPLOITATION | ACTION





MANCUNIAN MAN: THE LEGENDARY LIFE OF CLIFF TWEMLOW

2023 / DIR: Jake West / 124 Mins / UK

Cliff Twemlow gives a whole new meaning to the term Renaissance Man. Musician, author, bouncer, stuntman, and director, Twemlow is a legend in his hometown of Manchester. Now the rest of the world has a chance to catch up on one of the UK's most prolific indie filmmakers, who spent the '80s and '90s creating outrageous low-budget flicks with a cast of friends and family.

This engrossing documentary chronicles the many exploits of Twemlow, celebrating his tenacity and legacy of independent filmmaking. He first came into the spotlight with his book *TUXEDO WARRIOR*, based on his time as a bouncer. When the book was adapted into a film, Twemlow was inspired to start shooting his own direct-to-VHS films. Through sheer willpower, Twemlow created a mini-film industry in Manchester that lasted nearly a decade, giving birth to B-movies like *G.B.H. (GRIEVOUS BODILY HARM)*, which was banned as a "video nasty" at the time.

A larger-than-life figure, the doc is filled with amusing anecdotes and wild tales from Twemlow's friends and co-creators. However, beneath all the hijinks, Twemlow's real passion for cinema and creation, by any means necessary, shines through in this comprehensive tribute to his life and work. (LISA DREYER)

PLAYS WITH: BUTCHY'S BIG PITCH - SEE PG 115

Tags:
DOCUMENTARY |



#MANHOLE

2023 / DIR: Kazuyoshi Kumakiri / 99 Mins / Japan

Here at Fantastic Fest, we love a good single-location thriller. Trap our protagonist in a difficult situation, amp up the obstacles, and we are here for it! #MANHOLE delivers on all counts, taking an absurd premise and mining it for thrilling, fun, and surprising results.

After a night out celebrating his engagement with coworkers, a very drunken Shunsuke Kawamura (Yûto Nakajima, of Japanese pop band Hey! Say! JUMP) falls into an open manhole. With no ladder to the surface and a nasty gash on his leg from the fall, he's already at a disadvantage. However, he does still have his cell phone. And better yet, he gets perfect reception! But does Shunsuke call the police for help? Spoiler alert: NO.

What follows is a series of increasingly desperate and unusual attempts to get out of the sewer, from throwing his cell phone up as high as possible to try and video record his surroundings to attempting to catfish strangers into rescuing him on social media. But just when you think there's nothing more to be done and we've seen every possible outcome of being trapped in a sewer, the third act comes in with a vengeance and completely changes the story. Prepare yourself for a classic, big-screen Fantastic Fest crowd-pleaser. (LISA DREYER)

Tags:
SINGLE LOCATION | TWIST





MESSIAH OF EVIL (PRESENTED BY AGFA AND RADIANCE FILM)

1974 / DIR: Gloria Katz & Willard Huyck / 90 Mins / USA

Every frame of MESSIAH OF EVIL is a work of art.

After receiving unsettling letters from her father, Arletty (Marianna Hill) arrives in a sleepy California coastal town called Point Dume. Dad is nowhere to be found. Instead, Arletty finds a town full of drugged-out burnouts, barren shopping centers, and... something else.

Influenced by H.P. Lovecraft and 1930s gothic horror, MESSIAH OF EVIL is a swirling vortex of dreamlike imagery, experimental synthesizers, and grisly bloodshed. The movie was co-written and directed by Willard Huyck and Gloria Katz, the same team that would go on to write AMERICAN GRAFFITI, INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM, and HOWARD THE DUCK. But MESSIAH is a different beast than those generation-defining hits.

Filled with haunting Cinemascope landscapes and a design aesthetic that echoes everything from Herk Harvey's CARNIVAL OF SOULS to Mario Bava's KILL BABY KILL, this is an unjustly overlooked chapter of independent American horror that's primed for (re) discovery. MESSIAH OF EVIL truly feels like it was conjured, not made. (JOSEPH A. ZIEMBA)

Tags:

RESTORATION | HORROR | AGFA



MUSHROOMS

2023 / DIR: Pawel Borowski / 75 Mins / Poland

This is probably the shortest blurb I'll ever write (and the less said, the better) because writing almost anything about the plot will spoil too much.

It's best to just stick to a short synopsis: While collecting mushrooms and herbs in the forest, an old lady stumbles upon a young couple who have gotten lost. They beg her to help them escape the woods, but the old lady quickly senses that something isn't right with the couple... and now you have no choice but to check the movie out to uncover the story's mystery.

Clocking in at just under 70 Mins, MUSHROOMS is Pawel Borowski's third feature film. A graduate of the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, Borowski made a name for himself by directing a ton of commercials.

With MUSHROOMS, a story based on facts that "may or may not have happened," the Polish filmmaker offers a slow-burn, nerve-grinding story where audiences are masterfully led down a winding path of doubt. The film definitely requires patience, but the resolution is well worth it. (ANNICK MAHNERT)

PLAYS WITH: ANIMAL TRANSPORT - SEE PG 114

Tags:

TWIST | DRAMA





NOWHERE

1997 / DIR: Gregg Araki / 83 Mins / USA

Gregg Araki's protagonists, Dark (James Duval) and Mel (Rachel True), guide us through an alternate Los Angeles on their way to the ultimate party, driven by a fear neither of them can name. A bisexual couple in an open relationship, Mel hangs out with her girlfriend while Dark pursues a beautiful boy he can never seem to pin down.

As the two take separate paths to the party, they encounter a host of colorful and similarly alienated characters, many of whom are '90s celebrity icons: Traci Lords, Shannen Doherty, Ryan Phillippe, Christina Applegate, and Guillermo Díaz just to name a few. As they converge on their destination, their dwindling numbers and increasing anxiety force them to face a simple fact: This is their last day on Earth, likely at the hands of the laser-wielding alien stalking them through LA.

NOWHERE feels even more true some 26 years after the film's Premiere, embodied best as Duval's character prophesies, "It's like we all know way down in our souls that our generation is going to witness the end of everything. You can see it in our eyes. It's in mine; look. I'm doomed. I'm only 18 years old, and I'm totally doomed."

Described by its writer/director Gregg Araki as "90210 on acid," this existential take on the teen party movie circles the drain of American cultural decay and self-absorbed youth angst. Since the film's debut in 1997, we've seen no progress on climate change, a world-altering pandemic, and increasing economic divide between the rich and poor. The apocalypse foretold by Dark is here, and we're all living in its Kafkaesque, neon-lit death throes.

When I first saw this cult classic on an old DVD of questionable origin, I was struck by the film's urgency and anarchy. Confronting AIDS, sexual assault, and religious extremism, the film feels like it could have been made at nearly any point in the last two decades. Radical and hilarious, subversive and utterly ridiculous, NOWHERE is the kind of movie that helped many lost '90s youth, including my husband, find themselves.

Misunderstood by the mainstream at the time of its release but beloved by the queers and punk rockers depicted in this doomed generation, I'm delighted for Fantastic Fest to present this new 4K restoration of Araki's masterpiece. (AUSTIN KING)

Tags:

RESTORATION | QUEER |



ONE-PCENTER

2023 / DIR: Yûdai Yamaguchi / 85 Mins / Japan

Well-respected and past-his-prime stuntman Takuma Toshiro has made an endless slew of generic action thrillers since receiving critical attention for his commitment to pure action, fight choreography that adheres as closely as possible to actual martial arts. Fed up with the industry's reliance on CGI and hiding punches with quick cuts, Toshiro decides to make his own movie.

While location scouting for this ambitious feature, he gets the ultimate opportunity to put his action skills to the test. Rival yakuza gangs are in a race to uncover a lost stash of cocaine worth millions, and Toshiro is going to have to fight his way through both of them. Accompanied by his assistant and impromptu cinematographer, Akira, the stuntman is going to get the chance to make the action movie of his dreams... one with a real body count.

If you like tough falls and dudes punching each other, ONE - PERCENTER is a sure recommendation. Featuring elaborate fights choreographed by Fantastic Fest staple Kensuke Sonomura, who also handled action directing for BABY ASSASSINS and its sequel (also playing at the festival this year), this movie is a phenomenal showcase for its star, Tak Sakaguchi. Sakaguchi plays a stuntman in the role of a lifetime, getting the opportunity to showcase the real actor's "Samurai" approach to action that has made him a star in Japan and a viral YouTube sensation.

It is an absolute thrill to watch Sakaguchi efficiently and effectively take out groups of yakuza and stuntmen in long, unbroken takes. Following the philosophy of his character, ONE - PERCENTER revels in the legendary stuntman and actor hitting, kicking, and tackling his way through waves of men in an industrial warehouse with as little digital assistance as possible. Wearing their influences proudly on their sleeve, from a ZATOICHI-inspired flashlight set piece to naming all the characters after classic Japanese action filmmakers, ONE - PERCENTER is an action fan's paradise. A paradise that just happens to feature a few hundred dead goons. (AUSTIN KING)

Tags:

MARTIAL ARTS | FISTS IN YOUR FACE





THE ORIGIN

2023 / DIR: Andrew Cumming / 87 Mins / UK

A small boat reaches the shores of a raw and desolate landscape. A group of six have struggled across the narrow sea to find a new home. They are starving, desperate, and living 45,000 years ago. First they must find shelter, and they strike out across the tundra wastes towards the distant mountains that promise the abundant caves they need to survive. But when night falls, anticipation turns to fear and doubt as they realize they are not alone. Terrifying sounds suggest something monstrous at large in this landscape, something that could kill or steal them away. As relationships in the group fracture, the determination of one young woman reveals the terrible actions taken to survive.

Tags:

HORROR | TRIBAL



THE OTHER LAURENS

2023 / DIR: Claude Schmitz / 117 Mins / Belgium, France

Gabriel Laurens is a shaggy dog private investigator eking out an existence one seedy adultery case at a time. When his niece, Jade, shows up at his doorstep to notify him of his estranged twin brother François' recent death, he decides to take a hiatus and drive her back to her father's massive estate on the Franco-Spanish border.

Upon their arrival, they're met with a cold reception from Jade's calculating stepmother and her gang of crusty back-country bikers intent on tracking the young girl's every move. Short on cash, Gabriel vows to stick around just long enough to get things smoothed over with his bank. The more he sees, however, the more he realizes things aren't as cut and dry as they seem.

In order to unearth the true cause of his brother's death, Gabriel dons the identity of "the other Laurens" and is slowly drawn into François' shady underworld. Along the way, he'll cross paths with a bizarre cast of characters, including a pair of bumbling cops, an American mercenary, and a ruthless family of Spanish drug traffickers.

Steeped in vibrant neon imagery, THE OTHER LAURENS is a modern homage to the sun-drenched California noirs of the 1970s, injecting their laid-back, cynical vibe with a healthy dose of stylish European minimalism and droll humor. (LORI DONNELLY)

Tags:

NEO NOIR | BLACK COMEDY | POSTMODERN | SLACKER





PET SEMATARY: BLOODLINES

2023 / DIR: Lindsey Anderson Beer / 87 Mins / USA, Canada

In 1969, a young Jud Crandall has dreams of leaving his hometown of Ludlow, Maine behind, but soon discovers sinister secrets buried within and is forced to confront a dark family history that will forever keep him connected to Ludlow. Banding together, Jud and his childhood friends must fight an ancient evil that has gripped Ludlow since its founding, and once unearthed has the power to destroy everything in its path. Based on the untold chapter from “Pet Sematary,” Stephen King’s chilling novel, PET SEMATARY: BLOODLINES is a terrifying prequel and the story of why sometimes dead is better...

PET SEMATARY: BLOODLINES stars Jackson White (TELL ME LIES, MRS. FLETCHER) Forrest Goodluck (LAWMEN: BASS REEVES, THE REVENANT), Jack Mulhern (THE BOYS IN THE BOAT, MARE OF EASTTOWN), Henry Thomas (THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER, GANGS OF NEW YORK), Natalie Alyn Lind (THE GOLDBERGS, THE GIFTED) and Isabella Star LaBlanc (TRUE DETECTIVE: NIGHT COUNTRY, LONG SLOW EXHALE), with Pam Grier (CINNAMON, JACKIE BROWN) and David Duchovny (BUCKY F*CKING DENT, CALIFORNICATION).

PET SEMATARY: BLOODLINES will Premiere Friday, October 6, exclusively on Paramount+ in the U.S., Canada, Latin America and Brazil, and Saturday, October 7 in all other Paramount+ international markets. (PARAMOUNT)

Tags:

HORROR | PREQUEL



PROJECT SILENCE

2023 / DIR: KIM Tae-gon / 101 Mins / South Korea

Who let the dogs out? And who knew that a 20-year-old Bahamian pop hit would drive the mystery behind a frenzied Korean creature feature/disaster drama mash-up that screened at this year’s Cannes Film Festival?

While driving his daughter to the airport one night, the ambitious deputy director of Korea’s security department has a lot on his mind. He’s cooking up schemes to keep his boss in the lead in the upcoming presidential race.

A massive pileup on the 13-mile bridge that connects Incheon Airport to the mainland stops them dead in their tracks, but he sniffs another PR opportunity. He can’t stop his political scheming, even when a battalion of top-secret, government-trained dogs escapes on the same bridge.

The neglected daughter-workaholic dad dynamic of TRAIN TO BUSAN (the daughters in both films are even played by the same actress, Kim Su-an) is ported over to this taut, rip-roaring slice of man vs. dog mayhem as military and civilian survivors battle themselves and the fanged predators suddenly prowling a suspension bridge that could collapse at any moment.

Lee Sun-kyun of PARASITE leads the cast of this disaster spectacle suffused with “biting” political satire. PROJECT SILENCE roars in with a quick and clear setup and feeds us just enough emotional juice to keep us invested in the fates of this motley crew fighting for their lives, which include a wily tow-truck driver and a woman golfer nervous about her upcoming competitions, in a clear nod to fellow Korean creature feature delight THE HOST. (PIERCE CONRAN)

Tags:

FANTASTIC | HUNGRY DOGS | SCI-FI





PROPERTY

2022 / DIR: Daniel Bandeira / 101 Mins / Brazil

Still reeling after a terrifying, violent encounter left her in a constant state of anxiety, Tereza practically refuses to even leave her house. In an attempt to help her recuperate and get back to her old self, her husband buys her a state-of-the-art, voice-activated armored car and takes her to their family's country house, where, unbeknownst to them, the workers have revolted after having been callously dismissed by the management. The years of exploitation have built up, and they are ready to take their money, or the land. The only thing standing in between them and Tereza is this impenetrable beast of a car.

Tereza quickly realizes that the trouble with the voice-activated armored car is, she needs her husband's voice to activate it. And if her husband is being held hostage by the disgruntled workers...? Oops.

PROPERTY Premiered at this year's Berlin Film Festival, where aghast audience members walked out as the bodies piled up. Alongside Malu Galli, who portrays Tereza vibrating with terror as her worst anxieties come to pass, the film's second star is Pedro Sotero's camerawork, the same cinematographer that lensed Kleber Mendonça Filho's BACURAU.

Daniel Bandeira's reverse home invasion offers a sharp take on the clash of the classes in Brazilian society, delivering the tension of a great home invasion flick with a splattering (see what I did there?) of sudden, extreme violence. You might never look at your car (or your landlord) the same way again. (ANNA BOGUTSKAYA)

Tags:

SINGLE LOCATION | EAT THE RICH | THRILLER |



RAGE

2023 / DIR: Jorge Michel Grau / 93 Mins / Mexico

After the death of his wife, Alberto decides to start afresh by bringing his son, Alan, to his deceased brother's home in a rundown, gated community. Alberto very quickly finds out that his brother died in debt to most of the neighbors, and they're aggressively determined to collect payment.

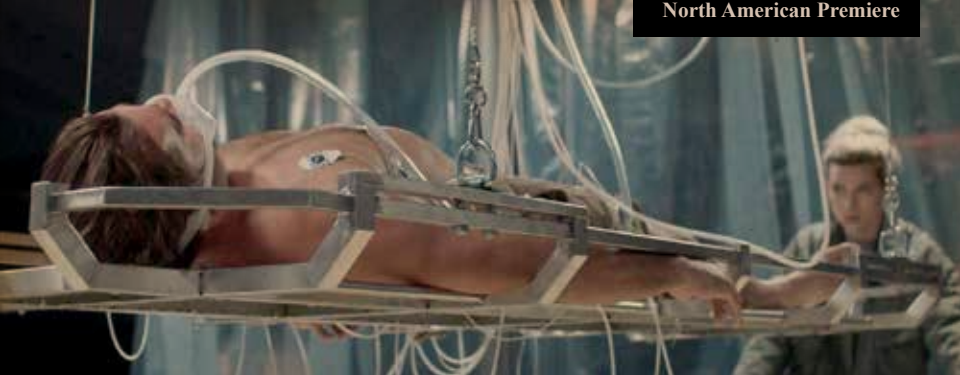
Left alone to fend for himself during the day as the only child in the community, Alan sneaks out to explore the neighborhood from the rooftops, making friends with a weird shut-in named Coco, who feeds him local information. As strange events escalate in the community, Alan discovers his uncle's old notebooks, which depict a monster, and is convinced that his father just might be a werewolf.

Jorge Michel Grau made a name for himself when his first feature SOMOS LO QUE HAY (WE ARE WHAT WE ARE), produced as part of his graduate film school studies, was selected to Premiere at the Cannes' Directors' Fortnight in 2010. Imagine his surprise when he was told later that Jim Mickle was set to direct the remake. Coming from genre and never really leaving it, Grau has crisscrossed the film landscape, drawn to different types of stories, like 7:19, a disaster movie about office workers trapped in a building during the fatal earthquake in Mexico in 1985, or PERDIDA, a remake of the Colombian thriller THE HIDDEN FACE. Although he hasn't been at the festival in awhile, Grau is no stranger to Fantastic Fest. It's about time we welcomed him back with his latest film. (ANNICK MAHNERT)

Tags:

WEREWOLF | CHILD IN PERIL |





RESTORE POINT

2023 / dir: Robert Hloz / 108 Mins / Czech Republic

The Czech Republic has an influential history of science fiction and fantasy, including the work of surrealist genius Jan Švankmajer, so it's refreshing and exhilarating to see a new addition to the country's sci-fi output.

In the near future, widespread economic inequality has given rise to extreme violence and, with it, a higher death toll. It is now every citizen's right to be revived in the case of an unnatural death. The Restore Point technology reboots the deceased to the last saved point of their lives, much like in a video game. This process is not widely accepted, though, and an activist group vehemently, and violently, opposes the idea of the Restoration Institute's scientists and technologists playing with resurrection.

When the Institute's head researcher and his wife turn up murdered without their restore points backed up in the system, hardened police officer Em Trochinowska (Andrea Mohylová) is assigned to investigate who might be behind the crime. As her investigation unfolds, conspiracies, hidden arrangements, and private stakes are exposed.

RESTORE POINT shines like the best high-concept science fiction does: a cracking idea that doesn't spend too much time on movie science. (ANNA BOGUTSKAYA)

Tags:

SCI-FI | ETERNAL LIFE



RIDDLE OF FIRE

2023 / dir: Weston Razooli / 113 Mins / USA

Three mischievous children on dirt bikes, armed with paint guns and cocky attitudes, launch an attack at a local warehouse, outwitting a security guard and "liberating" the very latest video game console for themselves in the process. But when they get home to play, they encounter one big problem: Mom's set an airtight password on the TV. Thus begins an epic quest to discover the password, with the kids finding themselves on an odyssey more exciting than anything they could have found onscreen.

Harkening back to classic '80s adventure films like THE GOONIES, where the kids faced real peril and a little cursing was no big deal, RIDDLE OF FIRE is a feel-good ride that clearly owes a lot to its influences but manages to feel fresh at the same time. This is due to the strong choices of writer-director Weston Razooli, who has created an immersive, singular world with no detail gone unchecked, from the stylish title cards to the dreamy set design to the perfectly retro synth soundtrack.

RIDDLE OF FIRE isn't really a kids movie, even though it's a movie kids could watch, but it is perfectly targeted at an audience that grew up playing Dungeons & Dragons and riding bikes unsupervised until nightfall, and who might be a little nostalgic for some real-life RPG magic. (LISA DREYER)

PLAYS WITH: THE LAW OF THE JUNGLE GYM - SEE PG 116

Tags:

FANTASY |





RIVER

2023 / DIR: Junta Yamaguchi / 86 Mins / Japan

A small village ryokan finds its routine upended when its guests and employees end up repeating the same two Mins. While trying to find the source of the time loop, characters confront discontentment with their employment, mortality, and the impending end of a relationship. Approaching themes of Japanese hospitality, small-town regret, and spirituality, this is a movie with plenty of laughs and big ideas.

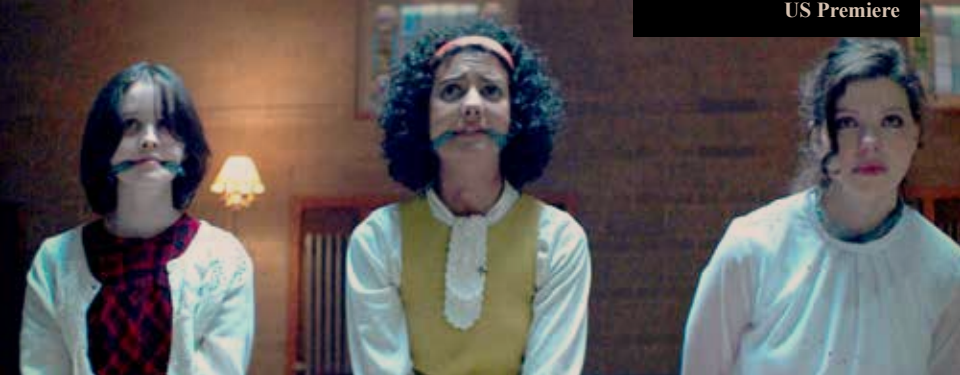
As someone who loved this group's previous work a lot, *RIVER* was a hotly anticipated title for me. The elements that made *BEYOND THE INFINITE TWO* Mins such a hit are still here, but this is proof the Kikaku Theater group is not resting on their well-deserved laurels. The camera movements are more playful, the costumes more elaborate, and the stakes higher. Director Junta Yamaguchi adds inventive stunts and practical visual effects to their repertoire, and writer Makoto Ueda mixes in a healthy bit of edginess to the playful comedic setup. Have no fear; any bad endings have another loop around the river to get resolved.

They've got two Mins to save the world, or at least their sanity. Uproariously funny and sentimental, *RIVER* is a welcome addition to Fantastic Fest 2023. (AUSTIN KING)

PLAYS WITH: DORIS & BETTAN - MARBELLA MAYHEM - SEE PG 115

Tags:

SCI-FI | A MOVIE WITH HEART



THE SACRIFICE GAME

2023 / DIR: Jenn Wexler / 100 Mins / USA, Canada

Merry Christmas, Demonic Entity!

It's that special time of year when hearts are warmed and cheer is spread, but this time, there's a touch of ritual murder to go along with the presents and lights. Jenn Wexler's *THE SACRIFICE GAME* arrives at Fantastic Fest to bring a bit of autumnal Christmas cheer. So grab your coziest sweater, your trustiest knife, and your flashiest bell-bottoms for this holiday trip back to the 1970s.

With nowhere to go for the winter break, Samantha and Clara must spend the season at their snowy boarding school. Unbeknownst to them, the building is the end point of a series of demonic sacrifices, and the two students are the only ones left to put a stop to the summoning ceremony before it's too late.

With a little bit of *HOME ALONE*, a little bit of teen angst, and a lot of grisly murder, *THE SACRIFICE GAME* examines 1970s disillusionment as a feminist coming-of-age tale with plenty of haunts and kills along the way. As the ritual creeps closer, the girls must confront the dangerous cult and the numerous ways their guardians and institutions have failed to protect them from patriarchal control.

And if that all sounds like too much, have no fear, because Wexler's direction keeps the material fun and campy. Gus Kenworthy's role as the school handyman and local heartthrob is almost as delightful as the numerous ways our reverse-harem cult employs to remove organs from their victims. Celebrate the season of giving with this little boarding school drama and a lot of blood. (AUSTIN KING)

PLAYS WITH: BOOKWORM - SEE PG 115

Tags:

HORROR | CULT





SALEM

2023 / DIR: Jean-Bernard Marlin / 115 Mins / France

Two apartment blocks split by ethnicity and controlled by rival gangs — the Locusts and the Crickets — are always on the brink of war. Jibril is a teenage Locust who's fallen in love with Camilla, a young Cricket girl, and like Romeo and Juliet, the two lovers' relationship is considered an outrage. Asked to set up a meeting with one of the Crickets, Jibril inadvertently draws him into a trap and witnesses his broad daylight murder outside their high school. With his dying breath, the boy curses the entire Locust community.

When Camilla's family finds out that she's pregnant and assaults her, Jibril sets out to settle the score, killing her brother in self-defense. Sent to prison, he is plagued by dark visions and inexplicable bites on his body, which he attributes to the curse. Jibril begins to manifest healing powers and becomes convinced that his daughter is the only one capable of lifting the curse on the Locusts. As he transitions from gang member to protector during his 12-year sentence, Jibril dedicates himself after his release to ensuring that his daughter survives the gang brutality to become both neighborhoods' new messiah.

Filled with biblical references, Jean-Bernard Marlin's second feature is far more than a movie about faith. Set in the harsh neighborhoods of Marseille, where gangs divided by nationality and religion fight for dominance, SALEM evokes Shakespearean tragedy as our main character, Jibril, is caught between two worlds, trying to make sense of what is happening and what is coming.

By playing with the possibility that Jibril's prophetic visions are just delusions, Marlin manages to manipulate the audience into doubting his protagonist's intense beliefs even as the plot demands that we take his side. Although the title, SALEM, is a reference to the Arabic word for "peace," there is no doubt that it's also a very subtle reference to the witch hunt themes we're all familiar with. (ANNICK MAHNERT)

Tags:

BIBLICAL CURSES | FORBIDDEN LOVE



SCALA!!!

2023 / DIR: Jane Giles and Ali Catterall / 96 Mins / UK

The Scala Cinema's legacy looms large in film culture, and not just in London. In SCALA!!! (officially titled SCALA!!! OR, THE INCREDIBLY STRANGE RISE AND FALL OF THE WORLD'S WILDEST CINEMA AND HOW IT INFLUENCED A MIXED-UP GENERATION OF WEIRDOS AND MISFITS), the raucous reputation of the cinema, which screened films from 1978 to 1993, is the stuff of legend. Operating during the austere, fear-mongering era of Margaret Thatcher, the Scala was an oasis of art flicks, grindhouse, gore and miscellaneous mind-benders.

While film censors in the UK were blaming horror films for moral decrepitude and banning them, the Scala Cinema was running psychedelic marathons and all-night screenings, giving a bevy of weirdos, cinephiles, and broke students their cinematic education, many of whom went on to become filmmakers, musicians, writers, actors, activists, and artists themselves.

Featuring interviews with former workers and notable audience members, including John Waters, Adam Buxton, Mary Harron, Ben Wheatley, Stephen Woolley, and more, SCALA!!! is a portrait of the era when the cinema was THE place to be. Former Scala film programmer and author Jane Giles, who personally faced legal action in 1993 for screening A CLOCKWORK ORANGE, makes her feature film debut with the untold history of the most infamous cinema in the UK. (ANNA BOGUTSKAYA)

Tags:

DOCUMENTARY | CINEPHILES |





SLEEP

2023 / DIR: Jason Yu / 95 Mins / South Korea

Marriage is a bond of trust, but how well do you really know the person sleeping next to you? For a couple in Korea, this question takes on nightmarish proportions when a husband's increasingly bizarre nighttime behavior begins to terrorize his very pregnant wife.

It all starts one night when the man utters the words, "Someone is inside," in his sleep. Over the following nights, this chilling pronouncement is followed by sleepwalking and a range of deranged activities, from raiding the fridge and eating raw eggs, shell and all, to self-harm. But is it only a matter of time before that violence turns on her and her newborn child? And, for the wife, for whom sleep is no longer an option, at what point will her own sanity begin to slip?

From debut director Jason Yu, who worked as an assistant director to celebrated *PARASITE* filmmaker Bong Joon-ho, *SLEEP* showcases a new voice in Korean cinema and a different kind of claustrophobic horror. Largely taking place in the same location with its two leads, the film makes inventive use of its interiors as it leads us to wonder if the couple are battling ghosts of the mind or the netherworld.

Beyond being an excellent display of technique and a fine acting showcase for Jung Yumi (*TRAIN TO BUSAN*) and Lee Sun-kyun (*PARASITE*), this spiritual descendant of *ROSEMARY'S BABY* manages to get under your skin thanks to its twisted sense of humor and the way Yu relishes in folding odd flourishes into this unique and unnerving psychological nightmare. (PIERCE CONRAN)

Tags:

HORROR | NIGHTMARES



SO UNREAL

2023 / DIR: Amanda Kramer / 95 Mins / USA

There was a moment in American cinema where the internet was the new monster. Fantastic Fest alum Amanda Kramer takes a stab at documentary filmmaking for the first time with *SO UNREAL*, a collage of cyber-cinema films narrated by Blondie's Debbie Harry. Kramer's previous works, including the psycho-horror one-woman show *GIVE ME PITY!* and the teenage girl claustrophobia-fest *LADYWORLD*, have been set in realities similar but not quite like ours, which makes her foray into essay filmmaking so compelling.

For a time, cyberspace, virtual reality, and artificial intelligence were unquantifiable terrors that penetrated many genres of movie-making: teen films (*WEIRD SCIENCE*, *WAR GAMES*), science fiction (*THE MATRIX*, *TERMINATOR*), horror (*THE LAWNMOWER MAN*), and thrillers (*THE NET*, *VIRTUOSITY*). Some were more mainstream than others; some masterpieces of filmmaking; others B-movies with a lot of character but little depth. But put into context side-by-side, these films gain a whole new layer of meaning.

Stone-cold classics coexist with semi-forgotten flicks in *SO UNREAL*. The clips are woven together with Kramer's serene script, full of philosophical and cinephile musings about this bygone era where the saddest thing was to see a robot slowly realize its own inhumanity. *SO UNREAL* feels like a film fan's reverie. (ANNA BOGUTSKAYA)

Tags:

DOCUMENTARY |





SPOOKTACULAR!

2023 / dir: Quinn Monahan / 105 Mins / USA

Do you remember Spooky World?

There was a time when this little horror theme park, built in the middle of a Massachusetts cornfield, was the destination for all macabre-leaning folks and horror-curious tourists. Spooky World was more than just a theme park; it was a meeting point for horror celebrities, a bacchanal for horny young workers, and a home for lovers of the grisly and the goofy.

Executive produced by SFX legend Tom Savini, SPOOKTACULAR! is a delightful look back at a thriving moment in American horror culture, featuring appearances by a who's who of iconic figures from the genre, from Linda Blair to Robert Englund, Tiny Tim and Elvira, Dee Wallace, and Kane Hodder.

The doc tells the story of Spooky World's founder, David Bertolino, a PR-savvy mix of P.T. Barnum and Stephen King who parlayed his experience working in his father's costume shop into creating the largest horror scream park of its kind. Interwoven into Bertolino's narrative, the film delves into the lives of the aspiring actors and misfits from the nearby rural community who grew up working as the park's haunters. The romances, the scandals, and so many potentially flammable scenarios...

SPOOKTACULAR! is a worthy work of archival research and new interviews. After watching this doc, I desperately wished I'd been around to experience Spooky World myself. (ANNA BOGUTSKAYA)

Tags:
DOCUMENTARY |



SRI ASIH: THE WARRIOR

2022 / dir: Upi Avianto / 133 Mins / Indonesia

Alana is a boxer with aspirations of competing against men and taking her rightful place as the champion of her local boxing circuit, despite not being taken seriously due to her gender. The tournament is a front for a local gang, and Alana's on the verge of discovering that she's the reincarnation of the ancient Goddess Asih. This revelation comes with super speed, inhuman strength, a magic scarf, and the attention of an evil deity seeking a human host.

Many American superhero movies of late have been, let's say, inconsistent in quality. It's easy to feel burned out on the genre. Luckily, SRI ASIH is here to prove that the Indonesian Bumilangit Cinematic Universe is just getting started. There's a focus on martial arts fighting and sparingly used CGI. If you're worried about not understanding this movie's place in the overall narrative, have no fear. This is a mostly standalone story focused on Alana and her personal journey and is only the second outing in this budding cinematic universe.

Pevita Pearce plays Alana with a barely contained rage, intense physicality, and a chip on her shoulder against the rich and the patriarchy. SRI ASIH doesn't shy away from adult themes around gendered violence and class while maintaining an eye on thrilling action set-pieces. Director Upi Avianto, styled as just Upi in the film's credits, keeps the action grounded in Alana's boxing background even when mystical elements are introduced, with incredible single-take battles against a hallway of nameless goons or one-on-one ring fights with dudebro assholes.

Coming up in Indonesia's film industry directing comedies and crime dramas, Upi stakes her claim in the emerging superhero world as a director with intense, real-life fight choreography, physical stunts, and female empowerment. All of these elements build to one of the most impressive spectacles of the Fantastic Fest 2023 program, Alana facing off with ninjas and a shadow demon in an all-out factory brawl to prevent the resurrection of a fire goddess.

Strap on your bulletproof wristbands and get ready to box your way to SRI ASIH. (AUSTIN KING)

Tags:
SUPER-HERO | ORIGIN STORY



STOPMOTION

2023 / DIR: Robert Morgan / 93 Mins / UK

Ella Blake (Aisling Franciosi) is a talented stop-motion animator living in the shadow of her ailing and overbearing mother, herself an influential animator. Doing her bidding, day after day, there's little space for Ella to work on her own stuff or to have a life of her own. She is her mother's hands, moving her creations one fifteenth of an inch at a time. She befriends a little girl, finds a boyfriend, but these short tastes of independence don't last. When her mother dies, however, Ella is not released from servitude. Instead, she increasingly struggles to keep a grasp on what is real, and what is part of the film she's creating.

Robert Morgan, known for his work on ABCS OF DEATH 2 and many short films that have been a staple of horror festivals, including the truly grotesque THE CAT WITH HANDS, melds stop-motion animation with a haunting character portrait of a woman on the verge of a homicidal meltdown. As Ella, Franciosi (best known for her harrowing leading role in THE NIGHTINGALE) brings a fractured intensity to her performance, playing a woman so used to being pushed about that freedom is frightening.

Building up towards the most devastating finale I've seen in recent years, STOPMOTION will embed itself into your brain. (ANNA BOGUTSKAYA)

PLAYS WITH: A SHINING EXAMPLE - SEE PG 117

Tags:

STRUGGLING ARTIST | ANIMATION



STRANGE DARLING

2023 / DIR: JT Mollner / 96 Mins / USA

A relentless predator tracks an injured woman through the Oregon wilderness. The woman does her best to outsmart her attacker, but with each tense moment she grows weaker and less able. He's a man on a mission, and it's only a matter of time before he captures his prey. Written and directed by JT Mollner (OUTLAWS AND ANGELS), and starring Willa Fitzgerald (THE GOLDFINCH, REACHER), Kyle Gallner (SMILE, DINNER IN AMERICA), Ed Begley Jr. (BETTER CALL SAUL, A MIGHTY WIND), and Barbara Hershey (BLACK SWAN, INSIDIOUS, THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST). (MIRAMAX)

Tags:

TWIST | CAT AND MOUSE |





THE STRANGLER

1970 / DIR: Paul Vecchiali / 95 Mins / France

While wandering the streets of Paris as a young boy, Émile watches as a young woman is choked to death. Fascinated by the incident, Émile grows up stalking the streets of Paris, murdering lonely women. Detective Simon Dangret has been tasked with putting a stop to the unknown serial killer, and the two men will discover a connection neither of them expected in their game of cat and mouse.

While you may not have seen Paul Vecchiali's *THE STRANGLER*, you have certainly seen films influenced by the '70s French genre icon. Everything from *CRUISING* to *SE7EN* feels indebted to this sleazy, psychosexual exploration of loneliness and violence.

As is frequently the case with serial killer movies, Vecchiali's film takes an interest in the motivation behind the numerous killings taking place and why a particular person might find themselves irresistibly drawn to solving the cases. It is not enough to see the killer as a monster or the investigator as a hero of righteousness; the film wants us to see what these different sides of the same coin say about one another.

Not content just to give voice to the detective and perpetrator, *THE STRANGLER* allows its victims to express their own desires or repressed loneliness. In one of the film's most memorable scenes, as Émile prepares to throttle his next victim, the past-her-prime actress monologues about her sense of isolation and a longing for her return to the spotlight.

THE STRANGLER is thus less about solving the crimes, the audience and inspector learn the killer's identity pretty quickly, and more about the subjugated urges of the characters in the drama. A thief profiting off Émile's victims and a young woman intent on being the detective's bait enmesh themselves in the case for their own selfish desires.

As the camera tracks the players through rainy Parisian streets, you may find yourself asking: Are these men motivated by a desire for masculine control? Perhaps these women long for an escape from their gender expectations and patriarchal oppression? Maybe Émile and Simon focus on the violence they enact just to ignore their desire for one another?

THE STRANGLER offers no easy answers. Fantastic Fest is pleased to present the US Premiere of this new restoration to keep you talking in the lobby long after the movie has ended. (AUSTIN KING)

Tags:

RESTORATION | FRAGMENTED | CRUISING



SUBURBAN TALE

2023 / DIR: Stephen Alexander / 89 Mins / India

Radhika is not having a good weekend. She's on the verge of losing her crappy job for a shady credit card company, she can't pay rent, and she has to go home for her sister's wedding despite being estranged from the family. Once she arrives, it only gets worse. Her family is hiding a young boy possessed by a demon, and they expect her to help keep him secret from their, soon-to-be, very wealthy in-laws. As Radhika loses control of the demonic child and begins to show signs of possession herself, both her family and her past race toward an inevitably violent conclusion.

When the submissions screeners found this gem, I introduced it to the rest of the programming team by asking, "What if Kafka's *THE METAMORPHOSIS* was an Indian werewolf movie?" *SUBURBAN TALE* is a creepy movie with phenomenal visual effects and a captivating lead performance from Rashmi Somvanshi as Radhika. Somvanshi is onscreen for the entire runtime and must carry the domestic drama while turning into a werewolf. She is fierce, vulnerable, tragic, and angry at the hand dealt her in life, and we get to see this rage channeled through a demonic descent into blood-spilling fury.

In addition to tackling themes around gender inequality and economic disenfranchisement, Stephen Alexander's feature directorial debut is a horror-lover's paradise of fun creature design and gory deaths. The transformations are skin-splitting, and the lighting is on a constant strobe pattern. You'll be cheering for the young boy possessed by a demon to escape his captivity, not just for the grisly mayhem he'll inflict but also for delicious revenge. (AUSTIN KING)

Tags:

HORROR | CREATURE





SUITABLE FLESH

2023 / DIR: Joe Lynch / 100 Mins / USA

Do you feel bored by your life? Are you looking for some more exciting pastimes? Are you interested in becoming the next mortal vessel for a cosmic entity? If you answered “yes” to any of those questions, get ready to be tied up as we welcome the new age of our Lord Dagon in **SUITABLE FLESH**.

When a clinical psychologist makes a late-night house call to an erratic and handsome patient, she unwittingly becomes the next host of an eldritch being. Shortly thereafter, she loses chunks of time and suspects that the insane ravings of her patient may not all be in his head. As her grip on her marriage, her sanity, and her body slip away, **Fantastic Fest** will be along for the ride of cult ritual and kinky sex.

Barbara Crampton and Heather Graham headline this adaptation of H.P. Lovecraft’s novella **THE THING ON THE DOORSTEP**. Based on an unproduced Stuart Gordon script, **SUITABLE FLESH** gender-swaps its source material’s characters to examine sexual discontent, body issues, and the autonomy of women after a certain age. It’s a smart choice, exploring femininity within Lovecraft’s frequently male-centric space to offer a nuanced look at fidelity and middle-age eroticism.

Graham and Crampton each give knockout performances as everyday professionals and mad scions of an Elder God. Embodying guilt, rage, desire, and everything in between, these two fine actresses center the fear of the unknowable into the frustrations of upper-middle-class women. This is a horror movie ripe for an academic thesis and for gay men to quote to their friends for decades. (AUSTIN KING)

PLAYS WITH: LOLLYGAG - SEE PG 116

Tags:

HORROR | BODY SWAP



THERE'S SOMETHING IN THE BARN

2023 / DIR: Magnus Martens / 96 Mins / Norway

After inheriting his Uncle’s estate in Norway, Bill and his family move into their new home with the dream of turning the property into a bed and breakfast. As the family adapts to their new Scandinavian lifestyle, Bill’s son Lucas discovers an ancient elf living in the adjoining barn. There are rules to keep the barn elf happy, and Lucas does his best to follow them. But after Bill ignores Lucas’ warnings and plans a Christmas party in the barn, the elf plots to get rid of the intruders at any cost.

This captivating Norwegian horror-comedy unites Martin Starr (**SILICON VALLEY**) and FF alum Kjetil Omberg (**DEAD SNOW 1 & 2**, **THE TRIP**), under Magnus Martens’ skilled direction. This nightmarish and hilarious tale about an American family’s desire to fit in spirals into a survival saga laced with smart cultural jabs. If the allure of Norway and its mystical elves, coupled with a nostalgia for the playful horror of the 1980s piques your interest, don’t miss **THERE’S SOMETHING IN THE BARN**.

Tags:

HORROR | COMEDY | NORWEGIAN ELVES





TIGER STRIPES

2023 / DIR: Amanda Nell Eu / 95 Mins / Malaysia, Taiwan, France, Germany, Netherlands, Indonesia, Qatar, Singapore

In a small, rural village in Malaysia, 12-year-old Zaffan is the queen bee of her school. She's confident, popular, and studious, but things change for the worse after she gets her first period. One of her frenemies, Farah, bullies her until she's ostracized at school, and she may or may not be slowly turning into a tiger.

Set against the bright, leafy greens of the Malaysian landscape, Amanda Nell Eu's debut film exists in no particular time, which gives the story a fairy-tale-esque, timeless quality. Drawing from the director's genuine love of schlocky horror, TIGER STRIPES was one of the buzziest debuts at this year's Cannes Film Festival. Featuring some truly committed performances from the kids (who are all first-time performers!), TIGER STRIPES plays like a crossover between MEAN GIRLS and GINGER SNAPS.

Inspired in equal measure by Southeast Asian folklore, 1970s B-horror in the vein of HAUSU, and the cruelty of teenage girls, TIGER STRIPES is a whimsical fairy tale about metamorphosis that might strike a chord with anyone who had a difficult time surviving puberty. (ANNA BOGUTSKAYA)

Tags:

BODY HORROR | COMING OF AGE



TRIGGERED

2023 / DIR: Richard V. Somes / 113 Mins / Philippines

Miguel is the sole survivor of a military operation gone horribly wrong, haunted by the brutal death of his best friend at the hands of a militant cult in the heart of the Philippine jungle. Still suffering from the effects of PTSD, Miguel procures a job as a night watchman in a Manila warehouse where (in)conveniently "everything is flammable and explosive" as he attempts to uneventfully re-enter civilian life.

Living in the city's northern slums, Weng attempts to keep her good-for-nothing younger brother, Bogs, on the straight and narrow. When he runs afoul of the local kingpin, Weng reluctantly agrees to return to her illicit past as a drug runner for the notorious Valdez crew in exchange for his life.

Meanwhile, Romero, the head of a by any means necessary anti-narcotics unit, has been given orders by his colonel to wipe the Valdez crew out to keep the corrupt mayor's ties to cartel money off the record. When Weng and Bogs narrowly escape the bloody scene and take shelter in Miguel's warehouse, he escorts the interlopers from the premises, but not before the police intervene. Now Miguel and Weng must engage in the most brutal warfare in a no-holds-barred fight for their lives.

Boasting a massive body count that would make John Woo proud, TRIGGERED revels in decadent '80s- and '90s-style bloodshed. A must-see for action fans who prefer their movies with large doses of firepower. (LORI DONNELLY)

Tags:

ACTION |





UFO SWEDEN

2022 / DIR: Victor Danell / 115 Mins / Sweden

After her dad's car reappears years after vanishing into thin air, rebellious teen Denise walks through the doors of UFO Sweden, a local ufology society, for help. The organization was once led by her presumed-dead father, who discovered that weather forecasts were far more than what they seemed to be. Although initially reluctant to help her, the group eventually caves, and their investigation takes an unexpected turn.

Remember THE UNTHINKABLE, which had its world Premiere at Fantastic Fest in 2018? The movie where Russia invades Sweden (cough cough), featuring that insane assault on a bunker filled with booby traps? Same team.

When I first saw the teaser for UFO SWEDEN a year ago, my jaw dropped, and I made a decision then and there, even without seeing the entire film, that it had to be part of your beloved fest... and when I finally was able to see it, I cried at its perfection.

Quoting Crazy Pictures' own words, they love to do the impossible. With a solid story, fantastic performances by a great ensemble cast, and backed by action scenes and VFX that shame much larger productions, the team at Crazy Pictures has done it again. Working together as a film collective, they are the perfect example of flawless collaboration. Everything is done in house, from inception to finalization. It's hard for me to contain my excitement as I write these lines. Sometimes I wonder why they haven't been offered a studio film yet... or maybe they have.

In my humble opinion, Hollywood doesn't deserve them. I hope they keep making impossibly crazy movies in Sweden. (ANNICK MAHNERT)

PLAYS WITH: RECORD. PLAY. STOP. - SEE PG 117

Tags:
SCI FI | DRAMA



THE UNCLE

2022 / DIR: David Kapac & Andrija Mardešić / 104 Mins / Croatia, Serbia

It's that time of the year again! We all love Christmas. The good food, the lights, the presents under the tree, and, of course, the visiting relatives... except this family doesn't really seem to enjoy their uncle's presence.

After a very awkward Christmas meal and an increasingly weird evening, the uncle leaves, only to return a few days later, and the family repeats that exact same yuletide celebration. You'll quickly be wondering just what the heck is going on.

In this dark comedy and debut feature from Croatian filmmakers David Kapac and Andrija Mardešić, Christmas takes on an entirely new meaning. Fear not: this is no European remake of GROUNDHOG DAY.

Recreating the '80s era in Yugoslavia to perfection, from the house, the car, and the clothes all the way to the camera look and the color palette, Kapac and Mardešić take us on an absurd journey that will not necessarily make sense to everyone but will certainly unsettle all. Swinging between horror and comedy, all the actors deliver impressive performances, especially Ivana Roščić as the mother and Miki Manojlović as the titular uncle, whom most will recognize from Emir Kusturica's movies.

THE UNCLE is a stirring first feature about power that balances its tension and absurdity skillfully, leaving audiences in need of a strong drink. (ANNICK MAHNERT)

Tags:
DRAMA | ABSURD





V/H/S/85

2023 / DIR: David Bruckner, Gigi Saul Guerrero, Natasha Kermani, Mike Nelson & Scott Derrickson / 110 Mins / USA

The remains of an ancient Aztec cult, a lake that brings the dead back to life, and a performance art piece attempting to contact a new god. How do these ideas relate? Well, you'll just have to pop V/H/S/85 in the VCR and see for yourself.

The found footage franchise returns to Fantastic Fest with more eldritch beings than you can cram onto a handheld camcorder. This installment features alumni galore as we journey back to the '80s for teenage campout shenanigans and newscasts from the pits of indigenous retribution.

Mike P. Nelson explores undead body horror and right-wing, gun-nut extremism in NO WAKE. Gigi Saul Guerrero brings the horror to a disaster recovery crew that runs afoul of an underground Tenochtitlan god in GOD OF DEATH. Natasha Kermani brings us a conwoman whose art installation ends up contacting a vengeful deity in TKNOGOD. And finally, Scott Derrickson returns to Fantastic Fest with a vision of a prophetic serial killer nightmare in DREAMKILL. The segments are all tied together with a terrifying wraparound from director David Bruckner.

Get ready for a found footage compilation of disembowelment, clubbing, and dismemberment, just to name a few of the grisly deaths. It's Reaganomics and imperial disillusionment in the way that only the V/H/S movies can do them, with the fake blood hose nozzle cranked up to the soak setting. (AUSTIN KING)

Tags:

HORROR | ANTHOLOGY |



THE WAIT

2023 / DIR: F. Javier Gutiérrez / 99 Mins / Spain

Eladio has been hired to watch over the hunting grounds of Don Francisco's estate, somewhere in rural Spain. The estate is divided into ten hunting stands, spaced far enough apart to avoid incidents. After three years of service, Don Carlos — Don Francisco's second in command — offers him a bribe to add an additional three stands to the property. Eladio initially hesitates, but his wife eventually convinces him to take the money. Eladio's greed has unfortunate consequences that drag his entire family to perdition.

In his third movie, after BEFORE THE FALL and RINGS, Spanish director F. Javier Gutiérrez takes us on the disturbing journey of a man who loses everything to evil. Beautifully shot and featuring a fantastic performance by Víctor Clavijo as the gamekeeper Eladio, THE WAIT is a strong rural thriller where the arid climate, the characters' isolation, and the archaic social ties to the big landowners saturate every scene. No doubt you'll walk out of the theater feeling the taste of dust in your mouth and needing a long shower.

(ANNICK MAHNERT)

PLAYS WITH: THE THAW - SEE PG 118

Tags:

FANTASTIC | WESTERN





WAKE UP

2023 / DIR: RKSS / 90 Mins / France

“Wake up, people! You’ve awoken the beast, and now we’re coming for you. It’s gonna be blood for blood.”

”That was savage, bro.”

So begins the clarion call from a group of Gen Z self-styled activists. Incensed by the environmental destruction wrought by a fictitious minimalist Swedish furniture store, the band of six sneaks into the big-box store after hours to wreak havoc of their own, gleefully destroying displays and smearing animal blood on bathroom fixtures for the benefit of the ‘gram.

As emboldened as they may be, their sense of outrage pales in comparison to the seething, decades-long resentment of the night watchman, Kevin. Already teetering on the edge of sanity and now piqued by his mistreatment at the hands of management and the disrespectful 20-somethings, he eagerly accepts their bloody invitation, putting his “primitive hunting” techniques to good use. As Kevin creatively picks off members of the collective one by one, those that remain stage a final stand in an attempt to make it out alive.

One of two films screened at Fantastic Fest this year by the Montreal trio known as RKSS (namely Anouk Whissell, Yoann-Karl Whissell, and François Simard), practitioners of ‘80s retro pop nostalgia (TURBO KID, SUMMER OF ‘84), WAKE UP channels the likes of classics like CHOPPING MALL for contemporary audiences, dripping with equal measures of cheeky cynicism and sincerity. (LORI DONNELLY)

PLAYS WITH: THE INFLUENCER - SEE PG 116

Tags:

80'S VIBE | SLASHER | CREATIVE KILLS



WE ARE ZOMBIES

2023 / DIR: RKSS / 80 Mins / Canada, France

Do zombies have rights too?

Taking inspiration from the Jerry Frissen and Guy Davis cult comic book series THE ZOMBIES THAT ATE THE WORLD, the Canadian filmmaking trio RKSS (TURBO KID, SUMMER OF 84) adapts the story into a comedy-horror that might just bring the zombie slacker subgenre full circle.

Set in a city populated by the living-impaired (the non-cannibalistic zombies, mind you), we follow a group of slacker buddies (Derek Johns, Alexandre Nachi, and Megan Peta Hill) who have concocted a totally foolproof plan to score money off the zombies, sorry, the living-impaired, by ripping off the super-evil Coleman Corporation, which is making money off the living-impaired by promising them a sweet retirement plan by collecting their decomposing bodies from their families for a fee.

The trio intercepts the collection efforts in order to sell the bodies themselves. All seems to be going well until the gang’s grandmother is kidnapped by the corporation, and to pay off the ransom, they must run increasingly madcap and dangerous errands for them. Cue the extreme gore and extreme hilarity.

RKSS (Anouk Whissell, Yoann-Karl Whissell, and François Simard) write and direct WE ARE ZOMBIES, infusing the zombie genre with a new energy, upping the cartoonish violence, and crafting an all-too-real world infused with corporate greed. (ANNA BOGUTSKAYA)

PLAYS WITH: ROOM TONE - SEE PG 117

Tags:

HORROR | COMEDY





WHAT YOU WISH FOR

2023 / DIR: Nicholas Tomnay / 101 Mins / USA

After toiling unsatisfyingly one roast chicken at a time in a chain hotel kitchen, Ryan (Nick Stahl) jumps at the opportunity for a holiday reunion deep in the rainforests of Latin America with his old culinary school buddy, Jack (Brian Groh), whom he hasn't seen in 12 years. More pressingly, though, Ryan has incurred a large gambling debt to a very bad man who desperately wants his money back and isn't above hurting him or his loved ones to get it.

As Ryan sips expensive wine and swims in the pool of a multi-million-dollar bungalow, he listens enviously to Jack, who has made a more than comfortable living as a private chef. Jet-setting around the globe in first-class luxury to provide exclusive dining experiences for the ultra-wealthy, Jack seemingly has everything that Ryan has always wanted.

"The reward always matches the atrocity," says Jack cryptically one evening before making a sudden, dramatic disappearance. Ryan makes the fateful decision to assume Jack's identity along with his ample bank account to settle the debt, but now he must also shoulder his employer's unique culinary demands.

The thriller serves equal parts Hitchcock, THE TWILIGHT ZONE, and film noir, offset with doses of black humor. Stahl (a man whose presence has consistently sharpened every project he's appeared in for over three decades) brings a weary, low-key charisma to the highly anticipated sophomore feature of writer/director Nicholas Tomnay. (LORI DONNELLY)

Tags:

JUST DESSERTS | EAT THE RICH



WHEN EVIL LURKS

2023 / DIR: Demián Rugna / 99 Mins / Argentina, Uruguay

In a rural village, two brothers find a badly mutilated corpse next to a mysterious journal at the edge of their property. Determined to figure out the cause of death, the brothers uncover a local man harboring an evil spirit who has been waiting for a specialist to come and rid him of his demon. Unfortunately, help hasn't arrived speedily enough, and the demon is ready to possess its next victim. Thus begins a race against time and evil as the brothers and eventually the entire village are drawn into the chaotic, heart-pounding mission to save their families and hometown from this nightmare.

Fantastic Fest regulars are no strangers to director Demián Rugna, who won Best Horror Picture for TERRIFIED in 2018 and was again awarded as part of the team of directors behind last year's anthology SATANIC HISPANICS. Rugna is a master at creating scenes that will scare the crap out of you, and WHEN EVIL LURKS is no exception. This film is truly unrelenting, with a propulsive energy that carries you from one horrific scenario to the next. If you don't audibly gasp (or scream out loud) at least once during this movie, I'm going to have to check your pulse to make sure you're alive. (LISA DREYER)

Tags:

HORROR | POSSESSION |





WHERE THE DEVIL ROAMS

2023 / DIR: John Adams, Zelda Adams & Toby Poser / 92 Mins / USA

Set during the Great Depression in the United States, the Adams Family's latest follows a murderous family of performers as they travel the land as part of a carnival. Their singing act is rather simple and unimpressive to the crowds, and the fact that their daughter Eve is mute and only speaks through song is kept from the patrons.

One evening, Eve visits a fellow performer, whose act involves cutting off his fingers night after night, and discovers that the man possesses a terrifying artifact that allows him to sew his fingers back on. Subsequently, the family breaks into a house on the road to their next gig... with fatal consequences. Wanting to save her parents, Eve steals the artifact, but her speech impediment and a misunderstanding of the ritual the artifact demands lead to an unexpected outcome.

You cannot NOT fall in love with the Adams. This family of artists, whose previous films include *THE DEEPER YOU DIG* and *HELLBENDER* (both Fantastic Fest selections), is as resourceful as hell. From writing the script to producing, acting, and operating the camera, they are the ultimate do-it-yourself filmmakers. Oh wait! They also composed the music and wrote the songs performed in the movie!

WHERE THE DEVIL ROAMS is a slow burn that will test your patience. Everything is carefully planned and planted, and the gradual desaturation of the image will lead you to such an unexpected finale that you'll be glad you went for the ride. (ANNICK MAHNERT)

Tags:

HORROR | DRAMA



YOU'LL NEVER FIND ME

2023 / DIR: Josiah Allen & Indianna Bell / 96 Mins / Australia

In the middle of a storm, a young woman knocks on a trailer in a desolate RV park, desperate for shelter. An elderly man lets her in, but both are immediately wary of one another, picking apart each other's stories and questioning one another's motives: Why exactly is this woman here, and what exactly is this man hiding?

The film's two actors, Brendan Rock and Jordan Cowan, show amazing range, playing off of each other with an electric chemistry that mutates throughout the film. As the film progresses, our allegiances shift as we gain clues into what exactly the two's connection might be. But no matter what you think is coming next, nothing will prepare you for the shocking climax.

Claustrophobic and tense, relying on pure emotion and intense dialogue to create a real sense of danger and dread, directors Josiah Allen and Indianna Bell have crafted a unique entry into the horror canon. It is a remarkably assured and tightly crafted first feature, one that will stick in your mind long after it's finished. We're proud to welcome them to the Fantastic Fest family and to see what they create next. (LISA DREYER)

PLAYS WITH: CALF - SEE PG 115

Tags:

HORROR | CAT AND MOUSE |





YOU'RE NOT ME

2023 / DIR: Marisa Crespo & Moisés Romera / 98 Mins / Spain

Christmas cheer is in short supply when Aitana, her wife Gabi, and their newly adopted son show up unannounced at her parents' gated mansion for a surprise visit. Although she receives a chilly reception from her parents, Dori and Justo, Aitana's younger brother Saúl brims with enthusiasm upon seeing his big sister for the first time since before his degenerative muscular disease confined him to a wheelchair.

Unbeknownst to Aitana, Dori and Justo have a surprise of their own named Nadia. Once a down-on-her luck Romanian refugee, the affluent couple have taken her into their home as a caretaker for Saúl. In the process, Nadia has become the daughter they've always wanted.

As if Nadia wearing her clothes and sleeping in her bed weren't enough, Aitana is livid when she sees that all traces of her existence have been wiped from the family home and that the family's traditional Christmas Eve dinner has been supplanted by a black-tie affair with fancy new friends. As Aitana's jealousy hardens, she searches for clues of Nadia's presumed treachery but regrettably discovers much darker reindeer games are afoot.

Attuned to the special kind of cruelty that only family can inflict on one another, directors Marisa Crespo and Moisés Romera infuse what could be a typical family drama with a sense of malice that culminates in a Christmas miracle, reminding us that home is where the horror is. (LORI DONNELLY)

PLAYS WITH: ASH - SEE PG 114

Tags:
THRILLER | CULT



YOUR LUCKY DAY

2023 / DIR: Dan Brown / 89 Mins / USA

It's Christmas Eve at the Sip N Go corner store, and the world's smarmiest man has just hit the 156 million-dollar jackpot. As he loudly proclaims his windfall, Sterling, a low-level street thug, draws his gun and demands the ticket.

When a beat cop emerges from the back restroom, the young rookie forces a standoff, accidentally killing the winning man in the crossfire and is mortally wounded himself in the melee.

Golden ticket in hand, Sterling's prayers have seemingly been answered, but as store owner Amir points out, it's not that easy. With the ticket encoded to the store and two dead bodies, one of which belongs to a cop, a thorough investigation is inevitable, and all of that money will disappear.

With tensions high and trust low, Sterling, Amir, and a young expecting couple, Abraham and Ana Marlene, begin to negotiate: How much is your silence worth? How about your complicity? Bargains are made and a plan is conceived, but as Sterling says, "It's better to be lucky than good," and these players aren't all that lucky.

Angus Cloud's performance as Sterling stands out as a highlight in this pressure cooker of a morality tale. Effortlessly charismatic, with a canny ability to telegraph the contradictory emotions and restless impulses of marginalized characters, YOUR LUCKY DAY marks one of the final performances of the unique young talent whose life was tragically cut short in July of this year. (LORI DONNELLY)

Tags:
BODEGAS | THRILLER | COPS AND ROBBERS | SHOOTOUT





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SHORT FILMS

.....
SHORTS WITH FEATURES / FANTASTIC SHORTS / SHORT FUSE
SHORTS WITH LEGS / DRAWN & QUARTERED
HAUNTINGS & REVELATIONS: INDIGENOUS GENRE
.....

SHORTS WITH FEATURES

As is our tradition, Fantastic Fest audiences will be treated to a variety of short form cinema at this year's event, including the following selections that will show up throughout the program in front of feature films.



THE 200 PHENOMENA OF CALGARY, ALBERTA, CANADA

Texas Premiere

2023 / DIR: Nicola Waugh / 13 mins / Canada

Calgary becomes the focus of online conspiracy theories when an anonymous notebook surfaces, containing 200 stories of occult and magical phenomena related to the seemingly mundane city.



AJE AND BRUJA

Texas Premiere

2023 / DIR: Nosa Igbinedion / 12 mins / Nigeria

A serial killer is on the loose; the "Aje" are invoked to empower their spiritual daughters. A short film discovery thanks to the Pan African Film Festival (PAFF).



ANIMAL TRANSPORT

Texas Premiere

2022 / DIR: Iván Bustinduy / 19 mins / Argentina

An animal transporter questions his sanity when he finds peculiar cargo in the back of his truck.

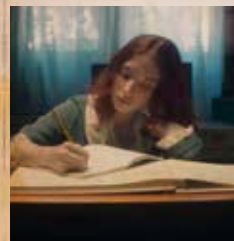


ASH

Texas Premiere

2022 / DIR: Kakhi Maxwell Jr / 10 mins / USA

An academic researcher risks his reputation when he returns from Africa with a souvenir he believes has the mystical power to achieve ancestral reincarnation.

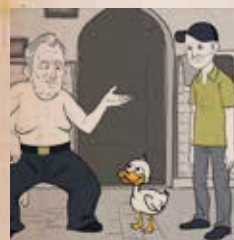


BOOKWORM

Austin Premiere

2023 / DIR: Javier Yañez Sanz / 14 mins / Spain

In 1970s Spain, an aspiring writer obsesses over a handsome ghost that haunts the library where she works.



BUTCHY'S BIG PITCH

Texas Premiere

2023 / DIR: Nick Prueher & Chrissy Fellmeth / 4 mins / USA

A depiction of one of many commercial pitches by Nick Prueher's downstairs neighbor, Butchy.



CALF

North American Premiere

2023 / DIR: Jamie O'Rourke / 15 mins / Ireland

A grisly farm accident elicits peculiar behavior from a teenage girl.



DORIS & BETTAN - MARBELLA MAYHEM

US Premiere

2023 / DIR: Ellen Ekman / 8 mins / Sweden

Two sun-loving gals wreak havoc when they refuse to be escorted from their favorite private beach.



THE DREAM OF THE SONGSTRESS

North American Premiere

2022 / DIR: Peter T Nathan / 10 mins / Australia

As one woman's turn as the Songstress nears its end, another responds to the call to take her place.



FORGOTTEN LAKE

US Premiere

2023 / DIR: Matthew Kennedy & Adam Brooks / 7 mins / Canada

Counselors at Forgotten Lake Summer Camp are horrified when they discover the legend of the Blueberry boy is more real than they could have imagined.



THE INFLUENCER

Texas Premiere

2023 / DIR: Lael Rogers / 10 mins / USA

An online influencer walks us through an unexpected "day in the life."



LAST WORDS

World Premiere

2023 / DIR: Teal Greyhavens & Nikolai von Keller / 10 mins / USA

When a hiker awakes in the wilderness to find herself separated from her friend, she hears a familiar voice crying for help.

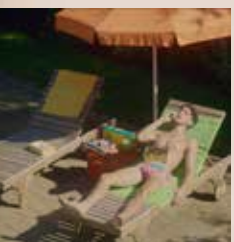


THE LAW OF THE JUNGLE GYM

Texas Premiere

2022 / DIR: Yoon Hei Cho / 6 mins / South Korea, USA

A group of children take things to extremes after realizing they can transform into animals.



LOLLYGAG

Texas Premiere

2022 / DIR: Tij D'oyen / 10 mins / USA

A macabre coming of age tale detailing a woman's sexual awakening in the East Hamptons.

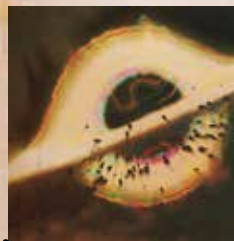


NO KEY

Texas Premiere

2022 / DIR: Walid Messnaoui / 22 mins / Morocco

A young man, desperate to escape his circumstances, steals a jewelry case in hopes there are riches inside, but he's stymied in equal measure by the lack of a key and his low-life brother.



RECORD. PLAY. STOP.

US Premiere

2023 / DIR: Neeraj Bhattacharjee / 7 mins / India

A probe wanders through space alone in a quest to archive the sounds of the universe.

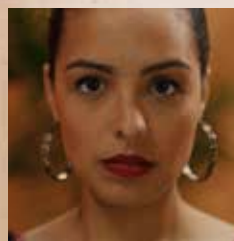


ROOM TONE

Texas Premiere

2022 / DIR: Michael Gabriele / 10 mins / USA

A sound guy resorts to violent methods when his noisy film crew keep sabotaging his attempts to record room tone.

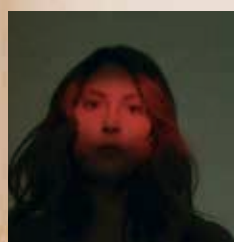


SABORRRR!

Texas Premiere

2022 / DIR: Gianfranco Fernández-Ruiz / 16 mins / USA

When a Puerto Rican actor finally lands her big break on a culturally exploitative commercial, she's thrust into a never-ending nightmare.



A SHINING EXAMPLE

World Premiere

2023 / DIR: Clarke Wolfe / 16 mins / USA

Aiden just wants to get back to show-running and needs to write the perfect pilot, but how can anyone expect her to focus between interruptions from her dead-beat husband and their attention seeking kid?





THE THAW World Premiere

2023 / DIR: Sarah Wisner & Sean Temple / 17 mins / USA

In late 19th century Vermont, a young woman's parents drink sleeping tea in order to survive the harsh winter, but an early thaw produces horrifying results.



TINY THING

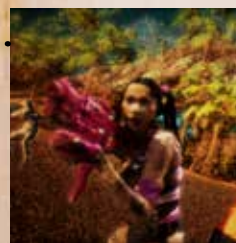
North American Premiere

2023 / DIR: Joshua Giuliano / 16 mins / USA

A couple's romantic getaway is derailed by a declaration of love and a tiny fly.

FANTASTIC SHORTS

We gift you this eclectic mixtape of the world's finest fantastic short films, from the heartfelt to the cynical, the gritty to the gross, and the restrained to the bonkers. Including makeshift home prisons, dangerous nighttime journeys, unrequited lovers separated, hallucinating mermaids, intergalactic delivery men, bumbling satanic cults, squirty dim sum, and (not to mention) trumpet nipples. Sit back, press play, enjoy.



ALEXX196 & THE PINK SAND BEACH

North American Premiere

2023 / DIR: Loïc Hobi / 24 mins / France, Switzerland

When the shutdown of an online game forcibly separates two teenagers who have grown close, they make a plan to finally meet in real life.

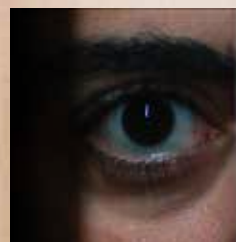


FOSTERING

International Premiere

2023 / DIR: Andrei Kashpersky / 19 mins / Poland

Due to an overflow in prisons, a riot policeman begrudgingly detains anti-war protestors in his family home.



NOBODY WANTS THE NIGHT

US Premiere

2023 / DIR: Remi Itani / 16 mins / Lebanon, Germany

A pregnant woman and her best friend navigate Beirut at night in order to obtain an illegal abortion.



PINK REEF

Texas Premiere

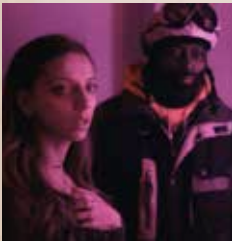
2022 / DIR: Chloe de Brito / 10 mins / Australia

In a suburban house with no running water, a lonely mermaid's surroundings collide with her subconscious when water begins to leak from the ceiling.



SHORT FUSE

Take a bite out of our totally demented and certifiably spine-chilling shorts block filled to the brim with body horror, bad dads, creepy creatures, and psychological trickery. With work that's both genre bending and that bids homage to iconic predecessors, we're bringing you cutting edge horror that will make you ponder the uncanny. We ask you to turn off the lights, turn up the screams, and let these shorts linger in your dreams. Happy haunting, Fantastic Fest!



POWER SIGNAL Austin Premiere

2023 / DIR: Oscar Boyson / 20 mins / USA

Amidst a mysterious plague infecting women across New York, a delivery rider is roped in by a pushy customer to spy on his ex.



BUTTERSCOTCH Texas Premiere

2023 / DIR: Alexander Deeds / 7 mins / USA

A boy torments an elderly man and steals his butterscotch, inciting the sweetest revenge.



SWEET JUICES Texas Premiere

2023 / DIR: Will Suen & Sejon Im / 15 mins / Australia

In a world where Chinese food is highly coveted, a desperate couple attempt to pay off their mounting debts with ridiculously delicious and juicy dumplings.



CHOMP World Premiere

2023 / DIR: Suki-Rose & Cricket Arrison / 9 mins / USA

A newscast team must fight for their lives when a mysterious intern's obsession to "smile for the camera" turns sinister.



WE JOINED A CULT World Premiere

2023 / DIR: Chris McInroy / 4 mins / USA

Two friends on their way to a game of kickball find themselves incessantly pressured to join an incompetent satanic cult.



FCK'N NUTS North American Premiere

2023 / DIR: Sam Fox / 12 mins / USA

Meeting the parents is next level nuts for this lovestruck man.



WRITE A SONG ABOUT HEARTACHE Austin Premiere

2023 / DIR: Jonny Look / 13 mins / USA

A struggling country singer and his slimy muse discover an unconventional method for lyrical inspiration.



GUMMY International Premiere

2023 / DIR: Sasha Aubort / 14 mins / Australia

A dental student struggling to find agency in her life spirals into madness after bringing her crush home to meet her father.



HOME

Texas Premiere

2023 / DIR: JEONG Jaehye / 13 mins / South Korea

A woman caring for her sick mother faces inexplicable phenomena in the home they share.



REDS

US Premiere

2023 / DIR: Tom Espinoza / 14 mins / Argentina

When a young vaulter experiences tensions with her team, she is introduced to a series of strange practices to bring her closer to her craft and the people around her.



THE THIRD EAR

North American Premiere

2023 / DIR: Nathan Ginter / 13 mins / USA

A nude drawing model grows a third ear after seeing a disfigured depiction of himself on paper.



TRANSITION

World Premiere

2023 / DIR: David Velduque / 16 mins / Spain

Angela lives alone, fearful of strangers and of change. When her reality is upended by the arrival of a new caregiver, she struggles to come to terms with truth vs. fantasy.



WHODUNIT

North American Premiere

2023 / DIR: Aditya Nair / 7 mins / India

Six actors engage in a surreal game of "whodunit" in a mysterious advertisement.

SHORTS WITH LEGS

Welcome to the fringes of Fantastic Fest with SHORTS WITH LEGS — our annual, anarchic spectacular of genre-defying, risk-taking, convention-breaking, and mind-bending short form cinema. Forget everything you've learned and brace thy senses for a collision of high and low, refined and scuzzy, elegant and crass. Among other delights, these selections feature the vibrations of Detroit, a controversial claim over the origins of electronic music, a sadomasochistic lunch break in a furniture store, a pro-life mob and an alien pregnancy, and of course, an ode to potatoes.



*666

US Premiere

2022 / DIR: Abby Falvo / 3 mins / Canada

Two women engage in an occult ritual in order to communicate with the devil.



AFRICANS WITH MAINFRAMES

Texas Premiere

2023 / DIR: Kima Hibbert / 15 mins / USA

A reclusive musician proclaims she's discovered that electronic music was actually invented by black southerners in the 1920s.

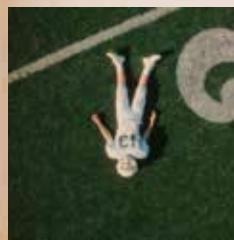


DRIZZLE IN JOHNSON

North American Premiere

2023 / DIR: Ivan Li / 21 mins / Canada

A scientist obsessively seeking the answers of the universe is thrust into a mind-bending odyssey of grotesqueries and genitalia.



END ZONE

Texas Premiere

2023 / DIR: Guy Kozak / 9 mins / USA

A young athlete journeys through the depths of his subconscious after being knocked out during a football game.



FETAL POSITION

Texas Premiere

2023 / DIR: Joseph Yates / 7 mins / USA

A man braves a pro-life mob in order to reach an abortion clinic and terminate his alien pregnancy.



HOT POTATO-WE GIVE THEE KNOWLEDGE

International Premiere

2021 / DIR: Adam Turner & Joe Murray / 4 mins / United Kingdom

A delightful and delirious trip into the world of potatoes.



LO-TECH REALITY

Texas Premiere

2022 / DIR: Guillermo García López / 8 mins / Spain, USA, France

Visitors arrive from the sky in Detroit in search of scientific knowledge only to find a desolate city devoid of people and vibrating with coded transmissions.



MOP

World Premiere

2023 / DIR: Joon Goh / 9 mins / Malaysia

During a lunch break in a furniture store, a sadomasochistic stand-off unfolds between a boss and her employee.

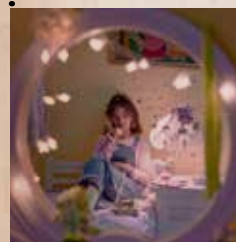


SOME DAY ALL THIS WILL BE YOURS

Texas Premiere

2023 / DIR: Cricket Arrison / 11 mins / USA

A pregnant woman shoots a film for her unborn child, documenting the haunted house that is their inheritance.



VHS TAPE REPLACED

Texas Premiere

2022 / DIR: Maha Al-Saati / 17 mins / Saudi Arabia

In 1980s Saudi Arabia, a young man seeks to impress his crush by making a tape of himself impersonating her favorite American popstar.



DRAWN AND QUARTERED

Imagination is let off leash and taken to new extremes in these eleven genre-bending animated works. Brace yourself for an epic journey of psychedelic self-discovery, trips into horrific consumption and consumerism, and mesmerizing tales of the unexplainable, brought to you by artists from all over the world. DRAWN & QUARTERED aims to annually challenge the audience to explore uncharted territory, and to transport the theater to places and spaces (re)imagined by the art of animation. This year, we invite you to enter the nightmares of youth, revel in the sexual fantasies of young adulthood, get to know a bear named Jesus, and much much more!



27

US Premiere

2023 / DIR: Flóra Anna BUDA / 11 mins / France, Hungary

A 27-year-old fantasist stuck living with her parents may finally be blessed with the epiphany she needs after she takes psychedelics and suffers a serious bike accident.



BABA YAGA

World Premiere

2023 / DIR: Annalise McCoy / 7 mins / USA

In a house with a mind of its own, an elderly witch conducts her day to day in this retelling of classic Slavic folklore.



A BEAR NAMED JESUS

Texas Premiere

2023 / DIR: Terril Calder / 6 mins / Canada

An Indigenous man relates a story of his mom's abduction by a bunch of bears, and subsequent conversion to fundamentalist Christianity.



DEMONS IN THE CLOSET

Texas Premiere

2023 / DIR: James Smith / 1 mins / Germany

To return to his dog and normal life, a man must face a series of demons in his closet.



THE FEAST

North American Premiere

2023 / DIR: Simón Bucher, Claudia Saldivia & Amanda Rivera / 9 mins / Chile

A feast hosted by a magical fridge transforms a creature into something gruesome.



HE RAN ALONGSIDE HIS COMRADE

North American Premiere

2022 / DIR: Genís Rigol Alzola / 14 mins / Spain

An optics-obsessed, tax evading businessman becomes a philanthropist by creating societal problems his charity promises to fix.



A KIND OF TESTAMENT

Texas Premiere

2023 / DIR: Stephen Vuillemin / 16 mins / France

When a young woman stumbles upon online animations based on all of her social media pictures, she resolves to track down the person who made them.



A PAW OVER DARK

Texas Premiere

2023 / DIR: Dorian Saisse & Marisa Molson / 10 mins / USA

A washed-up actor's spotlight is taken away when a rather entertaining dog wanders on stage.





PERFECT CITY: THE BRAVEST KID US Premiere

2023 / DIR: Shengwei Zhou / 6 mins / China, USA

A game of cat and mouse reaches intense heights in this child's nightmarish journey.



RIND US Premiere

2022 / DIR: Romy Matar / 5 mins / United Kingdom, Lebanon

Impulsive behaviors and obsessive thoughts manifest in distorted senses of self.



SHACKLE Texas Premiere

2022 / DIR: Ainslie Henderson / 10 mins / United Kingdom

A creative woodland spirit becomes the source of inspiration and jealousy for the other creatures of the forest.

HAUNTINGS & REVELATIONS: INDIGENOUS GENRE

In this block of films, Fantastic Fest is breaking new ground in the celebration of unseen cinema and bringing much needed attention to leading voices in the genre space. Co-curated by Fantastic Fest programmer Jean Anne Lauer and former imagineNATIVE film festival director Daniel Northway-Frank, we have brought together a truly global sampling of award-winning classic creations and new voices from Indigenous filmmaking communities to screen in Austin.

From the first film in our curated program, HAUNTINGS & REVELATIONS: INDIGENOUS GENRE literally drives us off the mainstream road into the world of Indigenous film through a new lens on the horror/thriller genre.

Indigenous horror in film refers to the subgenre of horror movies that incorporate elements of Indigenous cultures, folklore, or spirituality into their stories. These films often explore themes such as the clash between modernity and tradition, the supernatural, and the impact of colonization on Indigenous communities.

Films in this program from Indigenous creators and nations in Canada, US (New Mexico and Alaska), Australia, Aotearoa (New Zealand), and Norway showcase some of the best of past and present works.

From upending classic genre tropes to unsettling futurist realities, these stories from Indigenous nations across the globe bring new perspectives, voices, and stories to Fantastic Fest audiences. We hope you'll continue to look for films from this talented community of storytellers!



FILE UNDER MISCELLANEOUS Texas Premiere

2010 / DIR: Jeff Barnaby / 7 mins / Canada

Celebrated, and recently passed, Indigenous horror creator Jeff Barnaby's award-winning classic tale of assimilation in a dystopian future.



HIAMA Texas Premiere

2020 / DIR: Matasila Freshwater / 13 mins / New Zealand

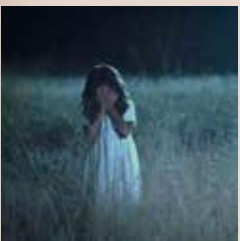
When a Solomon Islands teenager encounters bullying and microaggressions at school, she must take fate into her own hands with assistance from her family's guardian spirit.



METAL BELT Retrospective

2023 / DIR: Blackhorse Lowe / 14 mins / USA

A Peyote Western set in 1860s New Mexico territory, METAL BELT recounts a story about the American Indian slave trade in the southwest and one Navajo woman's fight for freedom and her spiritual journey home.



THE MOOGAI Retrospective

2020 / DIR: Jon Bell / 15 mins / Australia

A young mother becomes increasingly unstable when she is terrorized by a malevolent spirit she believes is trying to take her infant.



SIKUMI Retrospective

2008 / DIR: Andrew Okpeaha MacLean / 15 mins / USA

Apuna, an Inuit hunter, drives his dog team out on the frozen Arctic Ocean in search of seals and inadvertently becomes entangled in a life-and-death altercation.



SNIP Texas Premiere

2016 / DIR: Terril Calder / 15 mins / Canada

SNIP cuts up Canadian colonial histories by telling a story of survival amidst the genocide of Canada's Indigenous children.



TERROR/FORMING Texas Premiere

2022 / DIR: Rylan Friday / 20 mins / Canada

Told in one continuous shot over one evening, Parker and his boyfriend Darren travel to Parker's late kokum's cabin, setting the stage for how the night will unfold.



UNBORN BIRU Texas Premiere

2023 / DIR: Inga Elin Marakatt / 19 mins / Norway

A pregnant widow steals silver from a dead body in order to survive and feed her daughter. But the silver is cursed and has consequences for all of them, including the unborn.





BURNT ENDS

The Burnt Ends sidebar returns with another eccentric showcase of micro-budget oddities from outlier filmmakers who provoke and defy conventions of aesthetics and taste. These films are rare gems, often with little awareness, no fancy publicity campaigns, and unrepresented filmmakers. They are the boldest of innovators and most industrious of storytellers that deftly channel their creative ambition into original and visionary cinematic works. Head Pitmasters Ahbra Perry and Peter Kuplowsky, once more invite you to explore their eclectic menu, which like BBQ “burnt ends”, offer a delicacy to film fest connoisseurs in search of new perspectives and strange and unusual sensibilities.

Sincerely,

Ahbra Perry and Peter Kuplowsky

HEAD PITMASTERS OF BURNT ENDS - FANTASTIC FEST



THE ALL GOLDEN

2023 / DIR: Nate Wilson / 64 Mins / Canada

In 2021, veteran Fantastic Film filmmaker Nate Wilson (FUCK BUDDIES, THE STRAIGHTBALL) set out to make his debut feature - a ribald comedy on contemporary relationships wherein a bicycle courier discovers that her older, scholarly boyfriend has been hiding a sinister secret in his closet. As he was met with the trials and tribulations of no-budget filmmaking, the order and boundaries of the initial script began to buckle, convulse, and finally evolve into a labyrinthine and kaleidoscopic collage that both documents and deconstructs its very making.

Aesthetically evoking touchstones of the American avant-garde, from Kenneth Anger's INVOCATION OF MY DEMON BROTHER to Damon Packard's REFLECTIONS OF EVIL, Wilson deploys a dizzying array of formal and stylish devices as his film rehearses the “plot” of THE ALL GOLDEN in delirious fits and starts. Scores of subtitles will slide across the frame to impishly suture the chaotic imagery into a tapestry that remarkably does arrive an ecstatic emotional coherence, and a cacophonous soundscape punctuates the edits with a disorienting, but increasingly hysterical affect. In other sequences, Wilson utilizes dozens of takes to communicate an actor's single reaction, and the incredulous hilarity that accrues in these micro-montages are a testament to effortless charisma of his cast, which includes acclaimed comic artist Steve Manale, Benjamin Petrie (BLACKBERRY, TITO), and Morgan Krantz (IN THE DARK) - all of whom feature as romantic partners (sometimes even as the same character) to Wilson's polyamorous protagonist portrayed with mesmerizing effervescence by newcomer Lea Rose Sebastianis.

There's a Hollywood axiom that movies are never finished, they're merely abandoned. THE ALL GOLDEN is a film neither finished, nor abandoned, it's a veritable ouroboros, perpetually making and unmaking itself with credits that don't so much roll, they reignite.

(PETER KUPLOWSKY)

Tags:

BURNT ENDS



A GUIDE TO BECOMING AN ELM TREE

2023 / DIR: Skye and Adam Mann / 75 Mins / Ireland

There exists a profound sublime in the devilish details of a good ghost story. Their eerie effect is so often methodically cumulative, as the most memorable ones plant a disquieting thought that gradually blossoms into a nightmare with implications so overwhelming they quicken the heart and rattle the nerves. Such foreboding seeds are sown in this double feature of chiaroscuro hauntings from independent filmmakers who skillfully spin their ghostly yarns with minimal resources, but an assured and measured momentum that evocatively stir the spirits, both literal and figurative.

In Adam Mann and Skye Mann's elegiac feature-debut *A GUIDE TO BECOMING AN ELM TREE*, a grief-stricken man named Padraig sets out to build a coffin for his late wife. Under the austere instruction of an enigmatic carpenter, Padraig studiously applies himself to the laborious work, but is reluctant to adhere to his mentor's insistence that he familiarize himself with the dense history of the trees that they will fell for their timber. However, when a book in the carpenter's library promises a supernatural salve to Padraig's sorrow, the widower starts down a path he will soon regret.

In adapting Skye's novella of the same name, the Mann's have conjured a beguiling Irish folk fable; simply, but strikingly photographed, and with judicious infusions of Carlos Solares's stark and sinister score. Most compellingly, there is an exquisite patience to the film's grim trajectory. Deploying a kind of nesting egg of portentous parables throughout, each one unravels the psyche of its pitiable protagonist, just as it is sure to unsteady the film's most susceptible spectators. (PETER KUPLOWSKY)

A GUIDE TO BECOMING AN ELM TREE screens with *LETTERS TO THE POSTMAN*.



LETTERS TO THE POSTMAN

2022 / DIR: Felix Dembinski / 61 Mins / UK, England

There exists a profound sublime in the devilish details of a good ghost story. Their eerie effect is so often methodically cumulative, as the most memorable ones plant a disquieting thought that gradually blossoms into a nightmare with implications so overwhelming they quicken the heart and rattle the nerves. Such foreboding seeds are sown in this double feature of chiaroscuro hauntings from independent filmmakers who skillfully spin their ghostly yarns with minimal resources, but an assured and measured momentum that evocatively stir the spirits, both literal and figurative.

Shot for a pittance across half a decade, Felix Dembinski's auspicious and bewitching debut concerns a naive youth who assumes the responsibility of provisional postman for a coastal community in the English countryside. The initial tedium of the job is suddenly enlivened when the young man is charged with delivering a letter to an isolated homestead where a beautiful woman is said to reside. But his delivery attempt unexpectedly leads to an epistolary relationship between the postman and this mysterious woman, one that soon festers into an all-consuming infatuation.

Recalling the dry tone and timbre of Lawrence Gordon Clarks' work as a veteran director of the BBC's *A GHOST STORY FOR CHRISTMAS* series, and the gloomy gray glow of Victor Halperin's cult classic phantasmagorias (*SUPERNATURAL*, *WHITE ZOMBIE*), Dembinski achieves remarkable aesthetic, whose methodical rhythms are as haunting as they are hypnotic. Propelled by a steady stream of narration, performed in a pleasant, though uncanny meter by the filmmaker's father, and faithfully adapted from the film's obscure literary source, the film remarkably assumes a dreamlike air and confident classicism that grows downright intoxicating as it wittily tees up its potent punchline. (PETER KUPLOWSKY)

LETTERS TO THE POSTMAN screens with *A GUIDE TO BECOMING AN ELM TREE*.

Tags:
BURNT ENDS



THE PEOPLE'S JOKER

2022 / DIR: Vera Drew / 92 Mins / USA

If you think you know the story of Batman's arch-nemesis, think again. Gotham's Clown Prince of Crime takes the superhero movie hostage to clear up some misconceptions. First, Batman is not the hero we need but a corporate branding megalomaniac, and second, the Joker is a trans woman trying to liberate comedy from tech giant overlords. If this sounds like it's not officially sanctioned, you'd be a perfect candidate for the Penguin and Joker's anti-comedy troupe. **THE PEOPLE'S JOKER** is a rebellious, copyright-pushing ode to the Harlequin of Hate. Satire, of course, if any Queebs content police are poking around.

Told from her own perspective, **THE PEOPLE'S JOKER** reclaims one of comic book and blockbuster movies' most prolific antagonists as a camp, queer coming-of-age hero. Director/Co-Writer/Star Vera Drew crafts a hilarious, honest examination of trans identity through the lens of the most commercial and ubiquitous movie genre of the day. Pulling inspiration from the character's 56+ year cinematic history, this Joker uses two dimensional animation, CGI, live action, and stop motion animation to honor and interrogate the Joker's legacy.

Queer coming-of-age movies have been around as long as cinema, but what makes **THE PEOPLE'S JOKER** so refreshing is its embrace of the queer villain trope and the honesty with which Vera Drew tackles questions around trans identity and the modern media landscape. In an age where queer characters are frequently reduced to palatable, non-threatening leads (or worse), **THE PEOPLE'S JOKER** is a harbinger of institutional rebellion and property destruction. So bring your facepaint, pigtails, and estrogen vats and get ready to join the Caped Crusader's Rogues gallery yourself. (AUSTIN KING)

Screens with
THE HOLLYWOOD SIGNS
2023 / Dir: Michael Reich / 4 Mins / USA / World Premiere

Every year many films are made about Hollywood. This educational fever dream is one of them; courtesy of the director of the cult indie **SHE'S ALLERGIC TO CATS**.

Tags:
BURNT ENDS | QUEER



VISITORS (COMPLETE EDITION)

2023 / DIR: Kenichi Ugana / 61 Mins / Japan

Haruka, Nana, and Takanori show up unannounced at the house of Souta, their fourth bandmate, to shake him out of his funk. Although it is unclear what kind of music the band plays, they all seem pretty hard. Haruka, Nana, and Takanori are only mildly phased by the boarded exterior, peeling newspaper covering the windows, and general disheveled garbage-dump ascetic that is going on inside the home. Again, their music genre remains undefined, but Souta is definitely living the #grungelife.

The visiting band members all seem to take on different roles to deal with Souta's condition. Emotional support and affirmations tries to engage in conversation, acts of service member want to feed and nourish the distressed man, and the action-oriented one takes the initiative to get to the bottom of the issue by exploring the state of affairs in the rest of the home; We all know where this is going...

It doesn't take long for this film to walk blindly off the cliff of normalcy and drive headfirst into Crazytown. This beautifully bizarre sci-fi possession gorefest is filled with more green slime than a Marc Summers show and evokes the director's love and appreciation for what, presumably, was a Troma-filled childhood. Kenichi's first four films played at festivals and found some success in Japan, and the short version of **VISITORS** played at 40 film festivals, including Bucheon International Fantastic Film Festival and NY Shorts International Film Festival, where it won the top prize. This will be the **WORLD** Premiere of the feature adaptation, and we are spewing out of all of our orifices in anticipation!

(AHBRA PERRY)



Screens with:
FISHMONGER
2023 / Dir: Neil Ferron / 25 min / USA / World Premiere

A pathetic Irish fishmonger must survive a sex pact with an ancient fish creature in order to save his mother's soul from burning in hell.

Tags:
BURNT ENDS

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THE TIME: 2023

THE PLACE: A movie theater mega-plex on the edge of a post-apocalyptic boom town

THE INHABITANTS: Dazed thrill-seekers looking for their next score

All seems well, until **CHAOS REIGNS** and the endless stream of fantastic films runs out, plunging the former utopia into utter turmoil as the masses must face the unthinkable...

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